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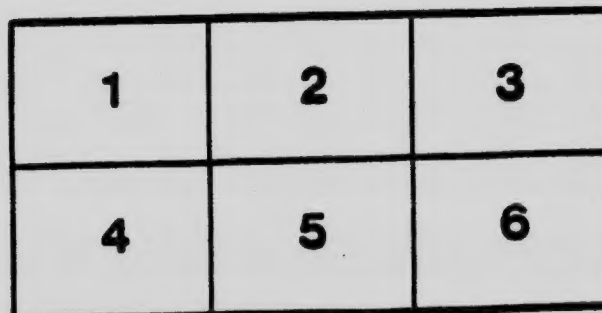
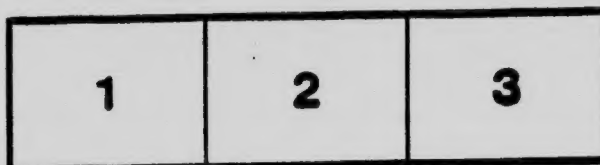
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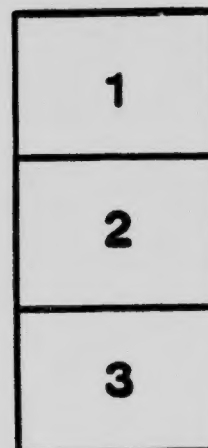
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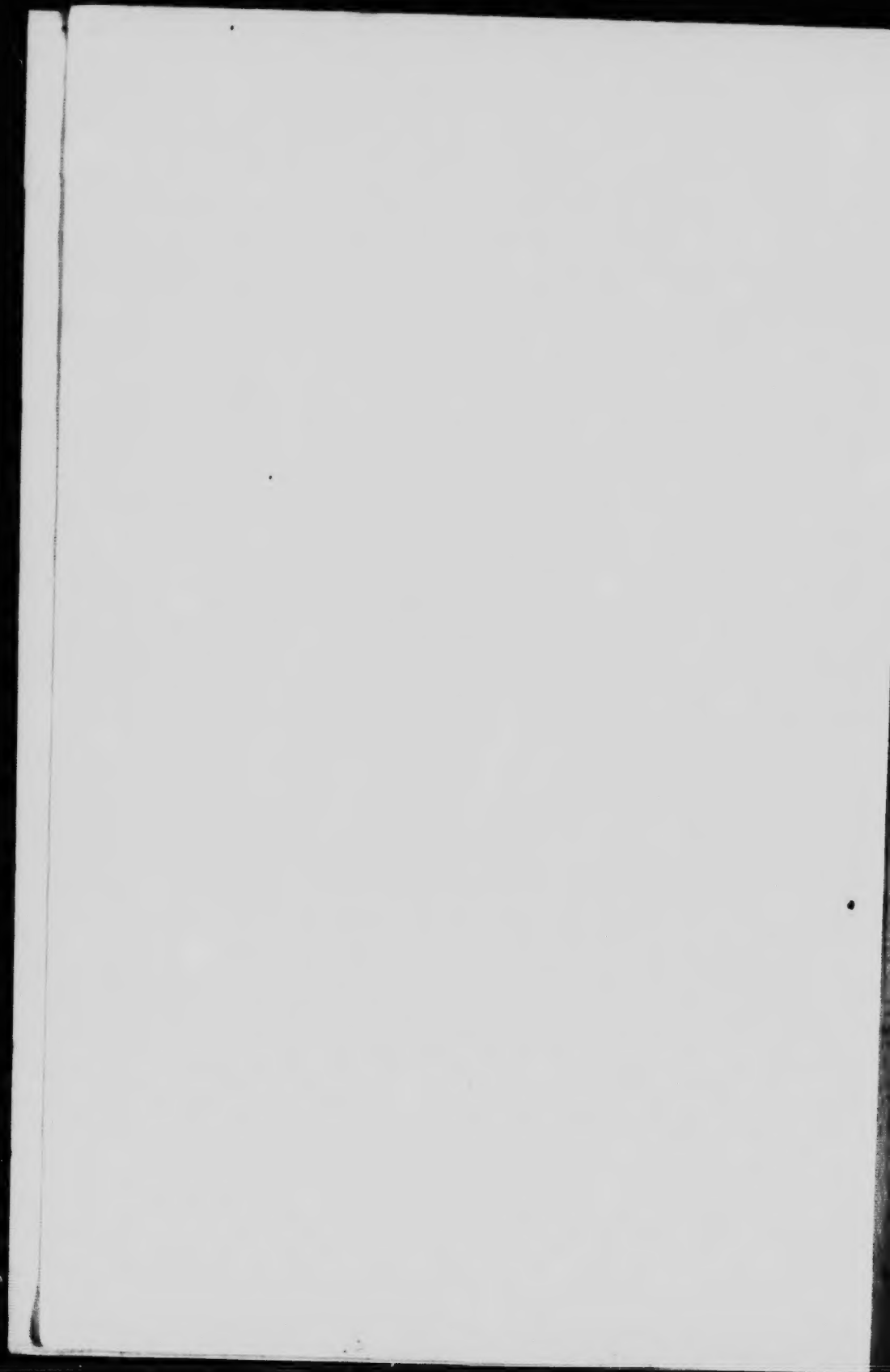
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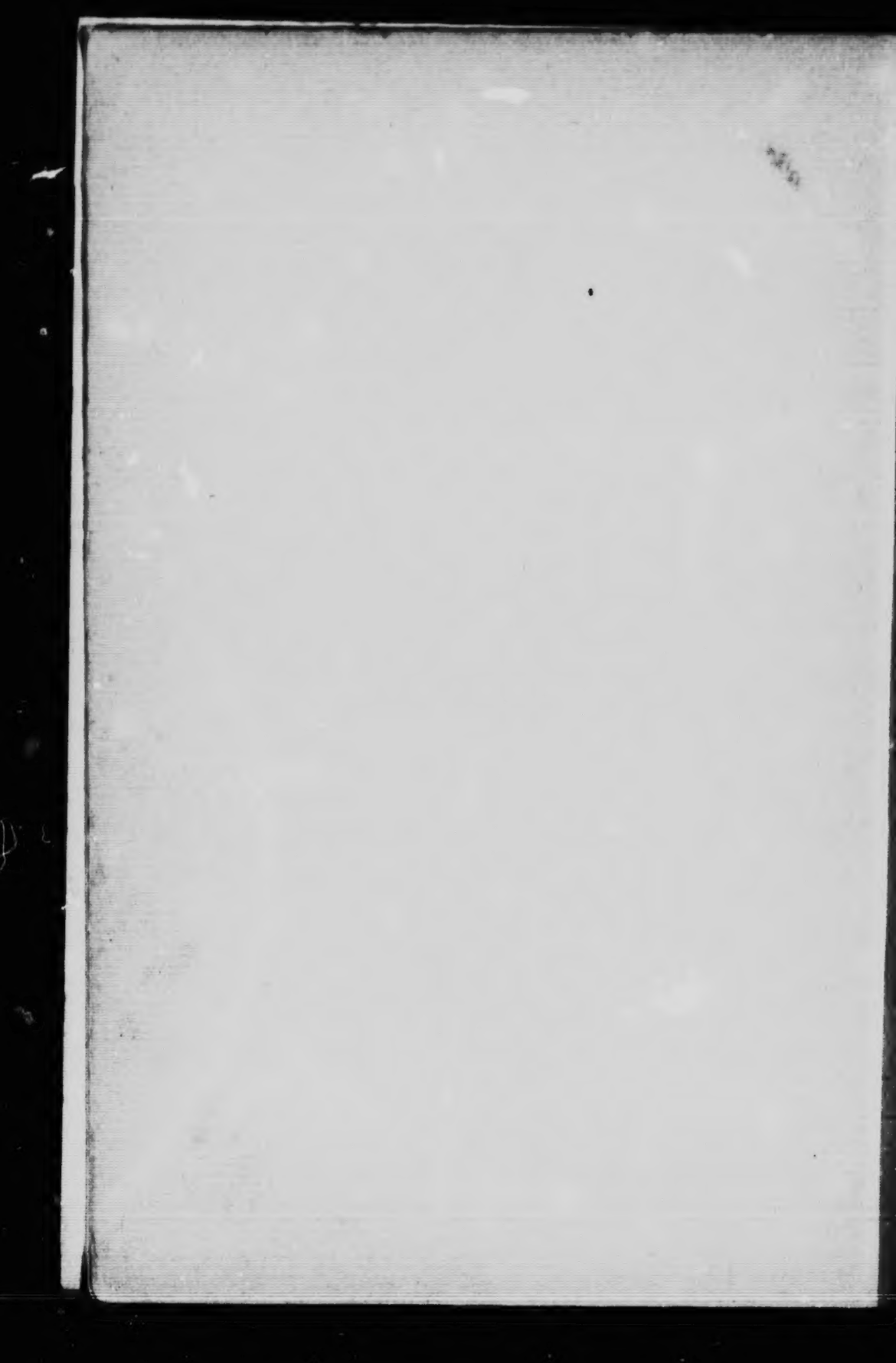
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AGE



THE TAMING OF THE RANCHER.



THE
TAMING OF THE
RANCHER

A Story of Western Canada

BY
ARGYLL SAXBY

Author of "Brave Toviak," "King Fire-Water,"
"Braves, White and Red," etc.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS.

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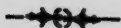
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To my Friend
MRS. ROBERTSHAW,
OF "WYNDHURST," WADSWORTH,
THIS LITTLE WORK IS RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED.

"The oasis in Life's Desert is Friendship; the fruit for the hungry traveller is a Kind Word; and the cool breath of air that soothes the fevered brow is Sympathy."—*From the Arabic.*

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The Taming of the Rancher.

CHAPTER I.

FOUR IN A SHANTY.

"WELL, boys, what do you think of this?"

The speaker was a rancher of a certain type that was not very foreign to Canada a few years ago, but which, fortunately, has been gradually disappearing during the last two decades.

Generally speaking, he belonged to the class popularly known as "tough," but in his case (as distinct from that of the others) the toughness was a superficial deposit upon a substratum of refinement—the latter being a foundation laid by early education in the Old Country.

Turned out of his home by a father whom he had exasperated by an early tendency to dissipation, Dick Westgarth had come to the North-West as a friendless boy of nineteen with £500 in his pocket—the only share he was told that he need ever expect from the Somerset estate that his father, Sir Alfred Westgarth, owned.

Now, although Sir Alfred had forbidden his son's name to be spoken in his hearing, it was generally understood that, as soon as the ferment of wrath had subsided, he would readily have given another £500 to have had the boy back again. But in the first heat of passion he had refused to hear any details of the lad's future plans; so, from the very moment of their parting, no message was ever exchanged between the youth and his home. True, he believed that Dick had always entertained a secret wish to reside in Canada. But this was generally attributed to a boy's romantic ideas bred by the class of adventure books to which he was partial, more than to serious intention. If he had been questioned, it would have probably been found that the old man's thoughts of his son were usually as of one who belonged to the flotsam of lower city life. However, he said nothing upon the subject, and even his child-robbed wife did not dare to broach the matter after experiencing the first cruel rebuffs when the paternal anger was keenest.

That Dick had not drifted to city life, we know; he went to Canada. There, after many ups and downs, he fell in with a set whose chief aim in life was to smuggle whisky from the United States, and sell the same at an exorbitant price to settlers and natives in defiance of the Prohibition Laws then attempting to regulate the liquor traffic in the West.

He did a thriving trade. He early associated himself on a horse-ranch with three kindred spirits (Ned Riley, Walter Mutch, and Ab. Shannon, by name) who were nearly his equals in daring, though

much lower in the standard of birth and education. Love of adventure was the common tie that bound them, though the three cowboys obeyed "the Boss," as they called him, as soldiers obey their colonel.

It was some fifteen years after the quarrel between father and son, when this rough chronicle takes up the thread of Dick's life. The day was that on which the weekly mail was received, and the rancher had been reading a letter while two of the boys (Mutch and Shannon) were "cleaning up" after dinner one day in spring. Ned was seated on a chair that he had tilted back at an acute angle, while his booted and spurred feet rested on the table. Westgarth was stretched lazily on a trestle bed. All the men were smoking "T. & B." plug in corn-cob pipes, and the room reeked with tobacco and food like a cheap lodging-house in Whitechapel.

"What do you think of this?" Dick had said, and, as he spoke, he threw a letter across the shanty, where it fell on the floor at Riley's side.

"What's it all about?" Ned had said, and, as he spoke, he lazily moved his great body to reach for the missive.

"Not a love letter, I guess," Mutch interjected, with a plate in one hand and a dish-cloth in the other.

"When the Boss goes in for love letters, then it'll be near time for us to go in for graves," remarked Shannon, who was cleaning a frying-pan at the time. (Shannon was generally understood to be a bit of a poet and a philosopher.)

"Love?" echoed Dick with a laugh. "My sweet-

heart is my broncho. That is the only sort of sweetheart for a rancher to have. Like Shakespeare's Benedick, when you see me fall in love, then you can put me in a bottle for a mark to shoot at."

But Shannon shook his head disapprovingly.

"It's mighty dangerous to jeer at such things, Boss. Him that thinks himself safest on the prairie, is the first to trip in a badger hole. 'Tis love that makes the world go round, they say."

"But we're not told *which* way round!" interrupted Riley. "My opinion is that it may go round the wrong way at such times."

"Well, I'd bet a hundred dollars that there is no fear of the Boss. He's too steady in his boots to be toppled upside down by a pretty face," was the reply. "But as to that letter. What's it all about, anyway?"

"Nothing extra special," said Dick, as though the conversation were rather fatiguing than otherwise. "It's just another of these sky-pilots coming to try his hand on Westgarth and company."

A burst of derisive laughter greeted this announcement.

"Another of them?" exclaimed Mutch. "Gummie! I thought that plague was ended long ago."

"So did I," replied Westgarth wearily; "but it seems I was mistaken. The animals come in one by one on this ranch. I suppose, like the previous lot, he is boasting to his chums how soon he'll have us all converted into deacons and chapel-bobbers."

"Then he's just about got his work cut out for him," chimed in Ab. Shannon. "He *might* just manage to

come somewhere near the mark with us in three hundred years or so, but it would take a sight more than an every-day pilot to convert the Boss in five hundred."

The men applauded this appreciation of their hero's imperviousness to the ministrations of the preacher.

"Our last visitor didn't stay long after trying his skill on my bucking Nell," chuckled Dick. "He was the sixth to bombard our shanty in a twelvemonth. I would almost have betted my life that he would have been the last."

"Seems to me," said Riley, who had just managed to wriggle his chair conveniently near to the letter,— "seems to me that we must think out something particularly fine for this coon, though he must have a good-sized dash of pluck in him to follow the rest."

The men grunted their unanimous approval of this sentiment—particularly the latter portion.

"I guess he thinks that the others have been gaming a bit," suggested Ned, who, by this time, had managed to procure the letter by the expedient of sticking it with a clasp knife. "But let's see what the paper says, anyway. After that we can plan out whether it's a tar-and-feather party, or merely a swimming match in the horse-pond that's to be his particular form of reception."

Then the speaker unfolded the letter, and commenced to read.

CHAPTER II.

THE PILOT ARRIVES.

"Steel's Ranch,

"15th May, 19—.

"DEAR Mr. Westgarth,"—the letter began,—

"You do not know me, but I have heard a great deal about you and the unruly set of cowboys whom you keep on your ranch."

"What!" was the simultaneous exclamation of Mutch and Shannon. Then the former added: "The puppy that wrote that is going to have his whiskers shaved off with the business side of a buck-saw."

Dick Westgarth reached out from the bed to knock the ashes from his pipe on the top of the cooking-stove as he observed chaffingly:

"It appears to me that the 'puppy,' as you call him, has managed to size up you boys to a nicety. He might have known you all your lives. I'm afraid I have not always been particular as to the company I kept. But read on, Ned." And the obedient cowboy resumed:

"I hear that not only do you refuse to lead a regular life, but that you are a source of moral danger to all who would like to live rightly; and you know as well as I do that the police are only

waiting for an opportunity to light upon you for illegal trading in spirits."

A loud laugh greeted this portion of the letter, for it was a standing joke in the country how a certain Inspector Scott, of the Mounted Police, had been foiled recently in attempting to check a well-carried out scheme to smuggle several kegs of whisky across the "line" from the United States.

"They'll have to wait a jolly long time," laughed Ned.

"'Great Scott' will have to be a sight greater before he finds *us* asleep," was Shannon's addition. "But read on, Ned. What does the coon yarn next?"

"Another cause of complaint is the disgraceful way in which you have treated several men who have tried to show you your mistakes. Now, whatever you may think on the subjects to which these men alluded, if you are men at all you must see by this time that for four hulking ranchers to torment one man who was only trying to do his duty, was purely the act of cowards—not what one would expect from men who are as daring as your lot are supposed to be. Perhaps, however, you are only bold when the four of you are together!"

"However, be this as it may, it is my intention now to take up the cause. There will be no more teasing of good-natured men, and getting them to ride dangerous bronchoes; no more school-boy tricks of which you like to boast, but of which I believe you are secretly ashamed if you were only brave enough to say

so. I intend to pay my first visit to you on Tuesday next. I have some twenty miles to drive from the house where I am at present a guest, so it will be afternoon before I can arrive. However, I shall expect you and your friends to remain at home to receive me.

"Yours very sincerely,

"E. ROSS."

There was quite a long silence in the shanty after the reading of this letter. Whoever the writer might be, the bald truth had been exposed by the reference to the treatment of the clerical predecessors. The cowboys recognised this, though the fact was not very palatable.

Westgarth observed the dejected looks of his companions.

"Well, how does it strike you, boys?" he asked. There was an amused pucker at each corner of his mouth which his brown moustache barely concealed.

"He strikes out pretty straight from the shoulder," said Riley. "What do you think, Walt.?"

"Me? Oh, I think that it is about the dernedest piece of cheek I've ever set eyes on. Think of a common sky-pilot ordering *us* to stay in the shak and receive *him*!"

"But the writer of that letter is not one of the common sort," argued Westgarth. "He is quite out of the ordinary rut. That is just where he seems to score."

"We'll receive him all right," rejoined Mutch, emphasizing his words with energetic movements of

the dish-cloth on the plates. "A bucket of pure cold water fresh from the spring in the ravine will be the reception he'll get from me. He may be hot with his pen, but I reckon I can cool his spirits a bit."

"But suppose he refuses to be cooled in that way?" suggested Dick. "It appears to me that the fellow who has such pluck of his opinions may have other ways of supporting them besides talk."

By this time the "wash-up" after dinner was complete in its elementary fashion, and the men began to move, preparatory to leaving for out-of-door work. But their movements were done in a leisurely fashion.

"I am not coming with you, boys," Dick informed his workers. "I am half expecting news of a cargo to be brought across the Line in a night or two, and I want to have a look at our stock in the underground safe."

"Right you are, Boss," agreed Riley, who was practically the manager of the ranch. Dick left all dealings in horseflesh to this cowboy's superior judgment. "But what about this letter? Tuesday is the day mentioned, so it must be *this* afternoon when the coon intends to poke his nose into our affairs."

"The pilot? Oh, I had forgotten about him. However, you leave him to me. I'll interview the fellow, and send him to the rightabout in no time."

"Whatever we plan, it must be something more than usually special to settle this trouble for time eternal," was Mutch's opinion, to which Ab., the philosopher, added: "It's a deal worse than skeeters. Life is like butter, and sky-pilots like flies: both are right enough

in their places. Separate, they are passable; together, well, they spoil each other's beauty."

"Well, that's only jaw, and not much good at that," grunted Riley, who was preparing a stone jar of tea with which to refresh himself and his companions at the field. "Can't you propose something new for us, Boss?"

Dick was by this time on his feet in the middle of the room, and as he again stretched his limbs, his great body reached from the floor to the roof, and seemed to fill the entire shanty. Suddenly he started, and an alert expression flashed over his face.

"I don't know," he said, "but whatever it is going to be, you'll have to look pretty sharp, for I hear a strange buggy coming up the bush trail. It isn't a trap that I am familiar with by the sound, so it must be our precious pilot on the warpath. Speaking for myself, I half like the chap for his cool cheek."

"But you're never going to let a chap take a rise out of us after calling us names?" queried Mutch anxiously, as the men all followed their leader to the shanty door.

For answer, Dick turned his head and looked over his right shoulder towards the last speaker with an amused expression, meant to indicate that the "pilot's terror" (as they admiringly termed him) was too old a bird to be tamed.

The four ranchers had barely reached the door, however, when there came rattling round a corner of the bush a high-stepping broncho dragging a neat buggy, in which there sat—not a black-frocked, wide-awake-hatted preacher as had been expected, but a

THE PILOT ARRIVES.

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young woman of about four and twenty, dressed in a neat spring attire of white muslin, fair, fresh and smiling. She handled the reins that controlled the rather fretful broncho as one who was as much at home behind a lively horse, as before a sedate piano, and her smile was so bright that not one among the men ever dreamed that here, indeed, was the unwelcome pilot.

CHAPTER III.

BEARDING THE LION.

WITH a well-gauged curve, the driver of the buggy steered her way through an impedimenta of farm implements and fire logs, until she pulled up directly before the door where the ranchmen were grouped. Then she handed the reins to the nearest bystander (who chanced to be none other than the philosopher), who received the leather ribbons as clumsily, though as readily, as a farm yokel receives his five shillings from the squire's wife at a ploughing match.

"Good day to you, boys!" she remarked lightly in a tone that was at once friendly without being offensively familiar. Then she jumped from the trap. "I see that you have been expecting me all the morning, and—here I am!"

"Can't say that we've been quite expecting you, miss," mumbled Riley, to whom the young lady's remarks seemed to have been specially directed, although they were couched in general terms. "We expected *somebody*, but not you."

The girl seemed slightly puzzled.

"I have not made a mistake, have I? This is Mt. Westgarth's ranch, is it not?"

"I am Westgarth," the owner of that name volunteered, at which the stranger broke out with impulsive pleasure :

"Oh, then it is *quite* right ! *I thought* I had not mistaken my directions." Then she turned briskly to Shannon : "Now, if you will only be good enough to put up my broncho somewhere, and give him a feed of hay, I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of the others until you return. I want us all to be real good friends, you know ; and the sooner we begin, the better. I may go indoors, may I not ?"

The last part of the speech was addressed to Dick. The rancher bowed his assent with a gracious courtesy reminiscent of the days of his civilised youth, whereupon the girl immediately marched straight into the shanty, and left nothing for the men to do but to follow sheepishly in her wake.

Once within, the visitor planted herself in the middle of the one-roomed house, and took a minute survey of the interior.

She noted the carpetless floor ; the pictureless walls ; the comfortless chairs ; the curtainless windows ; and the cramped little trestle beds. She observed the rusty state of the stove ; the cracked condition of the tea-pot ; and the hopeless medley of pots and pans tumbled like a heap of scrap-iron in a corner. In brief, she mentally decided on the discord of everything, and harmony of nothing.

Dick Westgarth was not slow to understand the disapproval in the girl's eyes. Indeed, he would have been mentally blind who would have failed to see

forcibly how shabby was the frame for the fair picture that had invaded its precincts.

"It is hardly a lady's boudoir," he remarked, half apologetically, half defiantly.

"I dare say you do not have many womenfolk in these parts to show you how things ought to be done," said the stranger.

The reply was courteously meant, but Mutch, who had been obviously resenting the invasion from the first, chose to take it as an implied slight.

"Guess we've managed to exist up to now without any apron strings in our shak," he growled.

But the visitor did not intend to be disheartened by the first rebuff. Further, she insisted upon receiving the snub rather in the light of a compliment than otherwise; so she turned a bewitching smile upon the sulky cowboy.

"Do you not think it would be a good plan, now, if you would all give me an opportunity to prove how necessary is the feminine hand in such places as this?"

"I presume you did not come with the intention of turning charwoman?" suggested Dick, cynically.

But again the shot failed to reach its mark, or, if it did reach, there was no flag to show that a bull's eye had been hit.

"You are right," responded the girl. "I came here with the fixed intention of having a good talk with the lot of you."

"We are at your service," rejoined Dick with an elaborate bow of mockery.

"I don't see that there's much to complain about in talking," said Riley. "I guess we can stand our load of that—so long as it's not too long."

The girl smiled.

"Nothing would please me better than to unburden my mind right here," she said. "But I do not see how it is possible to do so—yet."

"We've got good ears," grumbled Mutch, whereupon the fair visitor turned to the speaker and covered him with confusion a second time.

"Is it necessary to draw attention to the fact, my friend?"

The two other cowboys could not refrain from a hearty laugh at the sally. It was weak wit, certainly, but it served its purpose in restoring a degree of the good humour that was fast disappearing from evidence.

"Well, what do you want us to do?" asked Dick when the laughter was ended. "It is not often, as you yourself have said, that we have the pleasure of entertaining ladies, and I am sure none of us would like to seem lacking in courtesy when the honour is paid us. Will you—will you not sit down for a while?"

"Ah, that is just the point!" the stranger broke in. "You will pardon me for saying it, but, since I entered this shanty I have failed to see a decent spot to sit down upon."

Riley turned on his heel towards the door and sniffed angrily.

"There's plenty of good open prairie, if the seats are not good enough."

Yet the girl was not to be beaten.

"Is there now?" she asked with mock interest. "Then suppose you all go out and study the 'good open prairie' for a bit? I have just had a beautiful drive across miles of it, so the experience would not be as novel to me as it would be to you—judging by the freshness of the tobacco smoke indoors."

The persistent good humour of the girl was not without its soothing effect on the rough natures of the cowboys. A smile of genuine amusement lit up the faces of all present. It was not possible to raise a one-sided quarrel, and they readily saw the futility of the attempt.

Seeing signs of wavering, the determined young person decided to follow up the attack before any reaction was possible.

"Now, off you go like good boys. If you are still afraid to leave me alone with your treasures, then I will permit you to go without taking Mr. Westgarth with you. He will see that not one of your secrets is disturbed."

CHAPTER IV.

SHEWING HER METTLE.

IT was hardly surprising that the cowboys were uncertain how to act in the unusual circumstances. To be practically ordered out of their abode by a mere girl in such a high-handed manner was, to say the least of it, an experience as novel as it was irritating, and they all (including the now returned Shannon) looked enquiringly at their leader for a cue for the course to take.

But Dick merely shrugged his shoulders, and remarked in his peculiarly playful manner, as if he regarded the whole affair in the light of a huge joke, "Guess you've no choice, boys. I think I've heard it said sometime or other that women always expect to boss any show just as they please. You see, this is not the *Parson Ross* that we were expecting. I'll let you know when he comes, and that in good time for you all to have a share of the sport."

The words were spoken carelessly enough, and little did Dick think to raise such a tempest as immediately followed the utterance. With the last word, the young woman suddenly faced round upon the speaker, who saw, to his surprise, that all signs of previous brightness had instantly vanished from her face. Her lips were

now tightly compressed instead of half parted with overflowing fun. Her head was held high, and her eyes looked steadily at the man before her. Without a twitch of a muscle she stared steadily into the rancher's face for the full space of a minute. He returned the look bravely enough, but not without a certain vague consciousness of trespass—though he knew not clearly how he had erred. The rest of the men were silent.

Then she spoke. Her tones were the sharp tones of real indignation. Now, there was no pretence. It was the first note of the battle in which she was about to engage, and well she knew the value of a first effective blow.

"So *that* is the meaning of all this hesitation? That is the reason why you remained at home to meet me instead of going out to your usual duties? I thought it was the politeness of hospitable gentlemen, and I find it only the greed of bullies. You were not waiting to bid a stranger welcome to your ranch. You were waiting in the hope of being able to trick another man for the coarse amusement of yourself and your cowardly crew. Well, what is it you purpose to do? There is no 'Parson Ross,' as you call him. I am plain Ethel Ross, of whose coming you had due warning by the mail to-day. Oh, that astonishes you, does it, that a woman should venture where men have so often failed? Well, I ask you, what do you intend to do?"

The men were staggered by the revelation, and a threatening cloud settled on Dick's forehead.

"You may thank your stars that you *are* a woman,

and not a man," he said, "otherwise we would have found a ready enough answer by this time."

"That we would," added Mutch. "Those who treaded on our toes before will never want to set foot on this ranch again, that I'll bet. We taught them otherwise."

Ethel's lip curled contemptuously as she turned to the last speaker.

"'We,'" she repeated. "Always 'we' and never 'I.' The sign of a bully without exception. A brave man does deeds (even evil deeds) alone: wolves hunt in packs."

"Come, come, miss!" interrupted Ned Riley. "We can't stand too much of that sort of talk, you know. It would go much against the grain to be harsh with a woman, but——"

"Well?" the girl asked at the pause.

"Well, we are only human, and there is a limit to most things."

"There is," agreed the girl. "There is a limit to most things, and that is why I am here to-day. There is a limit to brutality; a limit to unlawfulness; a limit to Godlessness."

Dick smiled sarcastically.

"Pray do not preach to us, Miss Ross. We think even abuse is preferable to sermons."

"To the erring, most things are preferable to truth," replied the girl. "However, Mr. Westgarth, if these men of yours wish to be the first exceptions to the traditional courtesy of the prairie to strangers—well, let them say so, and I shall know how to act."

"And if we choose not to let you have your own way?" asked Riley above the murmur that followed this little burst of words. But the girl did not address her reply to the speaker. She bent forward, and whispered to Dick so that none but he could hear:

"If I fail now, Mr. Westgarth, I warn you that the next stranger to this den of whisky smugglers will be your father—Sir Alfred Westgarth, of Dean Lodge!"

If Dick had suddenly received a stab from a hitherto concealed stiletto he could hardly have been more staggered than he was at Miss Ross's unexpected revelation of what he thought was his dearest secret. He turned pale.

"Hush! Hush!" he gasped in a hoarse undertone; then he added aloud for the benefit of the cowboys. "Yes, yes—it was a mistake—the boys will go!"

Immediately the lady turned from her agitated companion as though unconscious of the consternation she had just caused.

"You hear?" she asked, as she allowed the old smile to play upon her face once more. "Mr. Westgarth wishes you to leave the shanty for a time. Now, do go without being asked again. You need not be afraid. I am not going to burn down the shanty in your absence. You may return about supper time—say, six o'clock. Then I shall have more to say, as well as a decent meal to set before you."

"Yes, go, boys! Go!" urged Dick with evident irritation at the delay; and without further dissent the three cowboys shuffled out, leaving Ethel mistress of the field.



"SURELY YOU COULD NOT EXPECT
TO KEEP THAT SECRET
FOR EVER?"

As soon as the departed were out of hearing, the girl turned again to Westgarth, who, by this time, had recovered his self-possession to a considerable extent, though he was now somewhat sulky and resentful.

"You must pardon me," she began softly. "I was sorry to cause you pain, and would have spared you if I could; but you left me no alternative. Yet surely you could not expect to keep that secret for ever?"

"In Canada—yes," said the rancher. "But I reckoned without the prying eyes of woman."

"Or the broken solitary heart of an old man who has been crying out these ten years for the forgiveness of his only son whom he almost believes to be dead. Oh! if he could only *see* that son and know him as he really is, would he not perhaps wish that he *had* found him dead?"

The rancher turned from the fair pleader with an irritated stamp of his foot, and strode to the door, where he looked across the beautiful Qu'appelle Valley, with its silver river and wooded ravines that were just sporting their spring mantle of fresh greenery.

"Tush, child! What do you know of such things?" he questioned impatiently.

"There is not a missionary in this, or any other colony, who does not know of this old man's search for his son," answered the girl. "The enlisting of their help has been the last effort of a dying hope."

For a few moments the man continued to gaze out from the door in silence. He was evidently meditating on the words that had just been spoken, and the vision of his old father sitting alone in the old home—longing

for the return of his son who never came—was a new thought that had never occurred to him before. He was not naturally a hard man, and his heart was easily touched by a picture of sadness. But then the thought of that parting-day in his youth came before his mind, and he turned to the girl with a sad smile.

"It's no use, Miss Ross. I know what you would want me to do, but things have gone too far for me to turn back now. Let us drop the subject and think of other things."

And the little pilot was wise enough to know that to urge a point too far before it has had time to grip firmly, is the surest way to defeat the object in view.

CHAPTER V.

HOUSE-CLEANING.

HOT water was in a kettle on the stove, so the first thing that Ethel Ross proceeded to do was to tuck up her dainty frock and then deliberately set to work scrubbing the floor, chairs and table.

It was this sight that caused Dick to note for the first time in his western life how absolutely squalid the shanty really was. Hitherto it had seemed good enough for a handful of cowboys, to whom any of the little refinements of living were as foreign as coarseness was common. But, as he watched the girl handling broom, cloth and scrubbing-brush, he began to wonder in a vague sort of way how he could possibly have been contented to exist so long among such surroundings. He would have gladly offered aid if there had been any likelihood of the offer being accepted. But there was something in the girl's expression that told him that she had no wish for interference, and he had perforce to resign himself to merely observing her movements, while he stood leaning against the door-frame—half in and half out of the apartment.

During the course of these cleansing operations, Miss Ross had come across more than one stone jar

which, though in most cases empty, still retained the odour of "fire-water"—that curse of the lives of so many young colonists. She found three, each containing quite a gallon of liquor, and one of which was addressed (by a label tied to the handle) to Noel Winton, whom she knew as a young rancher in the district—quite a boy—and a recent emigrant to the neighbourhood.

"Mr. Westgarth!" she called, after making this discovery, and hoping that her woman's wit would serve her in good stead. "Mr. Westgarth, have you any use for these jars?"

"Jars?" the rancher exclaimed hastily. "Oh, these?" And he flushed as he turned to see Miss Ross pointing dramatically to a row of seven, which she had placed side by side upon the table, while her face shewed unveiled disgust.

She had evidently hoped that immediate permission would have been given for the banishment of these intruders upon civilisation like the other rubbish recently disposed of

"These?" he repeated, advancing slightly into the room. "Well, perhaps not all of them. Several are empty; but two are full. One belongs to a friend, and the other—wouldn't it be rather a waste to throw away a whole gallon?"

The girl's face was serious in an instant, and there was pathetic significance in her voice as she replied in such tones of conviction that the suspicion of cant was quite absent:

"Better to waste twenty gallons than to lose—what

is of such infinite value. You understand my meaning, Mr. Westgarth, better than I can speak it."

The rancher was silent.

How often had he heard the same thought expressed in much the same words by the brusque lips of reproving manhood, and yet his conscience had not experienced the faintest twinge! But, to-day, when the question came from the lips of a good woman—laden with truest sympathy and immeasurable regret—he felt a veil of shame creep all over him.

"What would you wish me to do?" he asked in husky undertone.

"To pour the spirits from these jars where they will harm no one—out in the yard."

"With one that might be possible," said Dick.

"But, you see, only one of the jars is mine; the other I procured for Winton—a young fellow who came West last spring. I knew his people slightly in the old country."

"Has he paid you for it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you can easily refuse to do the business he asked, and return him his money."

"No, I can't do that," the rancher argued. "You see, Winton expects some chums at his shanty to-night, and has promised to give them a good time. It would make him look mean if he failed to keep his promise. I can't do that—I'm sorry, but—I can't, Miss Ross."

Ethel gave a deep sigh, but she knew it would be better not to press the point. One concession at a

time was all that she could reasonably expect. So she turned again to the jars.

"Then this third one. What is to be done with it?"

Westgarth was roused to active interest by the question.

"Third?" he repeated. "There is no third. There are only two with whisky. The rest are empty."

"Not at all," said Ethel. "There is another quite full."

The rancher came forward, and, pulling the cork from the flask, applied his nose to the opening. Then an amused smile spread over his features.

"Quite a false alarm this time, Miss Ross," he said.

"This is nothing worse than tea—tea for the boys to drink at the field. They have forgotten to take it with them. Poor chaps! They'll be mighty dry to-day in the broiling sun."

Ethel joined in the laugh at her mistake.

"That can harm no one," she said. Then she added in her first light tones: "Now, Mr. Westgarth, you'll go and empty *your* jar as you promised, while I banish these others to the outhouse."

Docile as a schoolboy, the rancher proceeded to obey; but hardly had he turned his back than a sudden idea took possession of the girl, and that the inspiration had more than the mere elements of fun in it might be well judged from the sudden sparkling of her eyes, and the twitching at the corners of her mouth.

She turned quickly to the remaining jars, and began excitedly to tug at the string of the label addressed to Winton. It was firmly tied, but at last she managed!

to unfasten the knots, and by the time Westgarth had returned from his mission outside, the address was transferred from the handle of the spirit jar to the one filled with tea.

"I suppose there is no use keeping *this* jar?" she asked innocently, at the same time indicating the one that had been robbed of its rightful label.

"None whatever," was the immediate answer. "The less rubbish we have in the shanty, the better."

"Quite so," agreed Ethel, and then Dick forthwith proceeded to treat the contents of the second jar as he had done the first.

By the time he returned, Miss Ross was once more in the midst of her cleansing operations, though she could scarcely restrain her longing to laugh as she pictured in her mind the scene of Winton and his friends when they attempted a "spree" on the leavings of Westgarth's teapot.

CHAPTER VI.

"I CAME, I SAW——."

SIX o'clock came at last, and with the hour returned the cowboys. They came prepared to say unpleasant things, and Ab. Shannon in particular had composed some of his most sarcastically philosophic sayings for the intruders' benefit. But, alas, how weak is man when his carnal appetites are disturbed!

Before the men reached the door of the shanty, a delicious smell of hot pastry, mingled with the aroma of fried bacon and hot coffee, smote their sense of smell far out in the yard. And when at last they entered, their tongues were tied by the sight of the transformed apartment.

"That's a fine smell, miss!" exclaimed Shannon. Whereupon Riley broke in impulsively: "'Tsmells like heaven, it does!"

"Then let us begin, friends," said Ethel, entering fully into the spirit of the rough sentiment.

No second invitation was necessary. A brief grace was interpolated during the pause between the taking of seats and the attack upon the food. Then the slaughter began.

It is to be doubted if ever a meal had been more thoroughly enjoyed by these ranchers than that which

was prepared by the "lady-pilot." True, a recent issue of the *Regina Leader* had to do duty as a table cloth; some of the cups had to be used without handles; and most of the knives were a little awkward, being minus holders. But it was a grand feast all the same. Dick Westgarth told some of the raciest anecdotes of his pioneer days; Riley forgot to grumble, and fell to praising the cook instead; Shannon poured forth all the gems of his philosophy that had not a bitter taste; and even Walter Mutch waxed so friendly as to confide in Miss Ross a love romance of his early youth.

Then, when every person's appetite was satisfied, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that Ethel should take a hymn book from her pocket, and begin the well-known strain:

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,
Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell,
Come ye before Him and rejoice.

It was the old tune, and there are few who have not learned the words in their childhood. With the first verse the girl was unaccompanied. But, as the singer continued to the second and third, the voices began to join in, until the last was a hearty chorus that made the little cabin ring with the melody flowing from four manly chests.

But all good things must come to an end, and Ethel suddenly remembered that it was time for her to return to the ranch where she was a guest.

"We've not had such a bad time after all," she observed to Dick, after the rest of the men had departed

to the stable—each anxious to have the honour of doing some slight service for their visitor.

"Perhaps if you are on the same trail again," said Westgarth, "you might care to drop in and have another talk with the boys. I guess they'd like to see you."

"Meaning that *you* would not?" asked Ethel, with the art of coyness that is the heritage of her sex.

"Well, I don't say that exactly," the other answered; "but, you see, we've not been much in the way of having girls on this ranch, and maybe the boys would be the better of it now and then."

Ethel laughed lightly.

"Ah, 'the boys' again! Always 'the boys,' never 'myself!' Now confess: you like to have things around you decent, and you laugh at preachers because you think it sounds what school-boys call 'big' to do so. You do not do so because you particularly want to? Come, confess!"

The rancher looked intently into the bowl of his pipe that he was pretending to fill with air, not daring to meet the girl's honest eyes, though he could feel that they were directed towards him, and burning straight into his heart.

"I suppose that is about the size of it," he muttered, dropping unconsciously into the western vernacular, then he added more cheerfully: "But you *will* come again, won't you?"

"That will depend upon many circumstances," the other replied.

"You know well enough that you will be welcome," urged the man.

"That is not the point. It is not my duty to wait until I am welcome. My mission is to make Good welcome in the home of evil. Whether I am welcome as well is a secondary matter that I dare not wait to consider."

Westgarth raised his eyebrows with an affectation of protest.

"Are we then such terrible sinners at the ranch?" he said.

But Ethel was not to be turned from the path of seriousness at such a moment.

"As to that," she replied, "I am not prepared to give judgment, but it appears to me that indifference to the sins of others is almost as bad as the sins of self."

Then the righteousness of the subject overshadowing all other considerations in her mind, the girl broke out impulsively: "Oh, Mr. Westgarth, can't you see what it is that is the curse of this colony? Can't you see the harm that must follow when even boys like Winton follow the lead of you men? It is not that they like it—yet. They want to be like *their* idea of men. And how can we blame them, or be surprised at the result, when we see such copies of men around them?"

Here the speaker paused at the height of her appeal. She had drawn nearer with the earnestness of her words, and unknowingly her hands had sought the rancher's arm, and her eyes, glistening with tears,

turned towards his face, for the subject had stirred her deepest sympathies.

Just then the cowboys arrived with the buggy in readiness, and, with a simple "God be with you all!" the girl drove away, to ponder at leisure over the unusual events of the day.

CHAPTER VII.

NOEL WINTON.

WHEN the men returned to their various duties that night, they were strangely silent.

Ab. Shannon was the only person to accompany Dick indoors, but when he ventured to broach the subject of their late visitor, he was so severely snubbed that he had to content himself by composing epigrams and verses in silence.

Westgarth was still disturbed in his mind concerning this girl who had suddenly come to interrupt the current of his life, and his thoughts also kept turning to a certain stately room, lined on all sides with books, among which sat an old, solitary man (a widower for some years), with no companions save these books; no thoughts save one: "Where is my son?"

Bye-and-bye his ruminations were broken upon by the sound of a rider cantering up the trail. The rancher turned to look through the open door, and a frown gathered on his brow when he recognised the visitor.

He was a boy of about twenty years of age (certainly not more), with light hair, erect, well-knit figure, clean-cut features—the typical son of an old English line. He was dressed in the usual ranch costume, and

looked the rancher to a certain degree. But he sat his broncho with a grace that was not learned on the prairie, and the neatness of his attire still evidenced the lingering traces of the tender-foot.

As the rider neared the shanty, other features might have been discerned by the reader of character that rather marred the first impressions of distance. His eyes had a somewhat "distant" look, and a considerably irresolute mouth betrayed an inability to brave successfully the weaknesses of life.

Pulling up sharply at the door, the youth slung himself out of the saddle, and fastened the reins to the side of a waggon near by. Then he turned to the house, and entered in the usual free and easy colonial way.

"Good evening, Westgarth; evening, Ab.!"

"Good evening, Winton," was Dick's brief and not over cordial welcome. "I suppose you've come about the—the stuff?"

"Yes," answered the youth, but his attention was taken up too much with surveying the unwonted cleanliness of the apartment to give further thought to the interrogation. "Why, what in all the world has come over you? Going to get married, Dick? It looks just as if one of you had got a wife knocking around: the room is so tidy, and—yes, I do declare—the floor has been washed—*actually washed*!"

To Westgarth, in his present frame of mind, this chaff caused much mental irritation.

"Oh, dry up, youngster!" he exclaimed at last. "A little of that nonsense goes a long way." But as

soon as the reproof was uttered, Dick's instincts told him that he had been uncourteous when no harm had been meant. "Sorry, old chap," he hastened to add. "I am a bit out of sorts to-day, and everything seems out of harmony. Let's go and smoke." So, slipping his arm through that of the lad, he led the way to the open.

"You'd better put up your broncho and camp here for the night," the elder suggested. Winton resided only some five miles 'distant, but "to dine and sleep" is a common invitation in the West. But Winton did not accept the hospitality.

"Not to-night," he said. "Fact is, there's nobody at the ranch. My chap has gone off to help his father who is laid up with a broken leg. Oh, bye-the-bye, that brings me to the object of my visit. I won't need that stuff to-night, since it happens none of my chums can turn up. They sent word to say that they would come over for our spree next week instead. So I won't need the whisky to-day after all. You can sell it to some other thirsty soul, and let me have a new lot next week."

The speaker had taken his horse's bridle in his hand by this time preparatory to departure, but he was suddenly arrested by an impulsive burst of feeling from Dick.

"No, Winton! You can't have any more whisky here. You've had more than enough already, but that is the end of it."

The surprised youth's lower jaw dropped to emit an exclamation, but his astonishment was too great for words.

"You see," the rancher pursued, though in more conciliatory tones, being half ashamed of his action, and anxious to find some plausible excuse apart from the real reason—"you see, it's all very well for hardened sinners like the Carrs, and Gordons, to drink hard, but with a chap like you it is different. You'll never get cured of your lung trouble if you go on as you have been doing."

"Can't say that I see it," responded the other sulkily. He did not relish a suggestion of his inexperienced youth. "As long as I do not forget to pay you, that is all that you need worry about."

"I suppose it is," observed Dick, lamely. He was not accustomed to preaching, so he had no homily at hand, and added clumsily (though to the point): "Still, you are not going to have it. I'll return you your money, and there the matter ends."

"Suppose I object to be treated in that way?" the boy then broke out impulsively. But the older man merely smiled with a sneer of amusement at the thought of this slip of a lad trying to oppose his will.

"Object?" he repeated. "I do not see how your objections can possibly affect me, sonny."

"Maybe you don't, but I do!" was the angry rejoinder, as the speaker flashed an angry glance at the rancher.

"Indeed?" was all Dick said, but the superciliousness of the tone was like a match to oil. Winton's temper was ablaze in a second.

"Yes!" he cried passionately. "I know too much



"YES," HE CRIED PASSIONATELY,
"I KNOW TOO MUCH TO BE
TREATED LIKE THIS."

to be treated like this. You can't afford it; you know you can't!"

"Meaning?"

"That a word from me——"

"To whom?"

"The Commissioner of Police at Regina. A word from me would cost you more than the price of a gallon of whisky. You know as well as I do how anxious the Commissioner is to nail you."

Had Winton been a few years older he might have known that it is not always wise to trust too faithfully in the strength of a dam. It may hold back the river for a time; on the other hand, a few drops of water beyond the just amount will burst the gates and cause devastation. But the boy understood Westgarth's outward calm as the silence of fear. Thinking that he possessed the master key to certain knowledge, he thought he held the power to command at will.

"I see that you have got it all cut and dried," said Dick. "Evidently you have expended much valuable brain power in thinking out all this. At the same time I wouldn't advise you to give too much thought to such matters. You have not got the makings of a scamp in you, and you might land yourself in an unpleasant mess."

Winton had now one foot in the stirrup, and he swung himself into the saddle.

"I know well enough which of us two will be in the greater mess," he retorted, gathering up the reins as he spoke. "Whoever it will be, Noel Winton is out of the reckoning; so you can decide for yourself which it

will eventually be. Besides, you are not the only fire-water monger in the district. I know where to get gallons without your help."

The boy dug his spurs into his broncho to settle the dispute by departure, but a firm hand gripped the bridle close to the bit, and brought the animal back on its haunches with a jerk that all but unseated the rider.

"Am I to understand that as a threat, Winton?" demanded Dick, though still with the same deliberation of wrath held in leash by a powerful will.

"If you refuse me what I ask—yes?"

"Then I do refuse—now, and for all time!" replied the rancher as he released the broncho. "But when you find yourself on the brink of the grave (as you will soon, if you don't ease up) don't forget that Dick Westgarth—bad as you think him—once tried to keep you out." And the frightened horse, with its equally frightened rider, darted down the trail.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOME-SICK RANCHERS.

WITH the close of the evening, the ranchers squatted outside the door of the shanty on upturned boxes, logs, etc., there to enjoy their pipes in the soft, fragrant air, and to discuss matters in general, before retiring for the night. None of the men, however, were very conversationally inclined. The impression left by the unusual events of the day was still very deep in their minds. Shannon, in particular, was moody—so self-absorbed in fact that Riley could not resist the chaffing suggestion that "Our poet's got struck on the little pilot." But the joke was not well received. Mutch continued absently to slice shavings in readiness for the morning fire; Shannon continued to stare into space as if there had been no sound besides the twittering of sleepy birds, the hooting of the owls, the occasional hum of a night-hawk, and the "wing music" of mosquitoes. Dick's frown, too, was sufficient to discourage any repetition of such sentiments, so poor Riley had perforce to vent his feelings on the energetic scraping out of his pipe bowl.

Presently Westgarth seemed to waken from his reverie.

"Boys," he presently began, "we have had a stroke of good luck and a stroke of bad, to-day."

The men started with slight surprise, and raising their heads, turned looks of puzzled enquiry towards the speaker.

"Yes," he continued,— "bad luck for our trade, and so bad luck for all of us."

"How so, Boss?" asked Riley. He was not accustomed to seeing the rancher depressed. The state was novel, and difficult to understand.

"We've made a friend; and we've made an enemy."

The answer (if answer it was) was mystifying, but as it did not seem to call for comment, none was offered. Silence was maintained by the cowboys, though they still fixed their eyes upon their chief, and columns of blue smoke continued to ascend from each mouth into the still air.

"The friend, boys, is one we've needed badly, though we didn't know of it before," Dick resumed slowly, and in a low meditative tone, as though he were speaking to himself rather than to his three companions. "Something has happened to-day that has made me remember things that I did not want to remember. It was the 'friend' started that."

"Meaning the gal?" Mutch ventured to suggest quietly.

"Meaning—Miss Ross," was the reply.

The cowboys nodded their heads slowly in accord with this expression of their common thoughts.

A long interval of silence ensued. The pipes still

burned, but otherwise there was barely a sign of life in the group.

Suddenly Westgarth started up.

"Boys, this won't do!" he exclaimed, with a movement as though he were shaking off depression as a dog shakes off the wet. "We seem to be bewitched to-night—the whole lot of us. We're not going to make ourselves miserable just because a lady pilot takes it into her head to clean up the shanty for us!"

"The oftener she comes, the better," mumbled Mutch, as he followed Dick's example. "It'll mean a deal less work for us."

"An'll give Ab. something to string his verses about," added Ned.

But Ab. was the only one whom this false effort at gaiety did not rouse.

"It's lies!" he growled, rising from the log seat, and moving towards the door. "It's lies, and you all know it's lies! You feel mean that a gal like her comes here and finds us all such a down-at-the-heels lot. *You* feel mean about it, and I feel mean about it, too. There's no getting away from that." Then the speaker turned his face towards his companions. There was a curious dreamy expression in his eyes, as if he had raised the curtain of memory, and was looking down the vista of happy days. "I know well enough what's been passing in your minds, though you want to make yourselves and each other think it isn't so." Then his voice dropped somewhat. The tones were sweetly soft and melancholy—almost musical. "Yes," he continued, "you've been thinking of a

shanty somewhere—hundreds of miles from this, most-like—where there were womenfolk about—a mother and a sister, maybe. You've been thinking of this, and it's made you feel as if life was a sort of gnawing hunger for something—you don't rightly know what." By this time the speaker had reached the door. He turned again for a moment, though before he did so he failed to deceive the onlookers that the hand that brushed across his forehead only touched his hair, and not his eyes.

"Boys," he said (and there was an uncomfortable quaver in the voice), "boys, I've got a terrible longing to see that old shanty, and—and the women-folk, to-night. It's a pity we didn't think of all we were going to lose, before we gave up so much." And then without another word the home-sick cowboy disappeared into the shanty. The rest of the cowboys prepared to follow his example, but Dick called Ned Riley to his side, and began to saunter with him in the direction of the stables.

"Poor Ab. seems a little upset to-night," he remarked with a suggestion of kind indulgence.

"Guess we're all tarred with the same brush, Boss," was the answer. "But you forgot to tell us about the 'enemy' that you said we had made. We can't afford many of that sort."

"You are right, Ned," said Westgarth. "And when the enemy happens to be one who is slightly in the know of things, it is particularly awkward. But fill up your pipe and I'll tell you about it. You know, Ned, that I trust you as I would trust no one else on earth,

and of course not a word of what I tell you must go any further."

"You may set your mind easy on that score, Boss," was the reply. "We've had secrets in plenty during our partnership, and our trade teaches us the value of silent tongues."

"That's true enough," responded Dick. Then he added thoughtfully: "Sometimes I begin to think that it might have been better if *some* secrets had not been so faithfully kept. I have an idea that, when we are old and trotting down hill, we'll begin to wish that our trail through life had been straighter."

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT HAVE WE DONE?"

IT did not take long for Dick to describe to Riley the incidents connected with his late interview with the hot-headed young rancher. For reasons which he did not consider necessary to explain to Ned, he omitted to state the causes that led to his refusing to give Winton the liquor. Perhaps he hardly understood the matter himself. At any rate, such was the state of affairs, and certainly Ned did not fail to recognise how serious it would be to all of them if the boy persisted in carrying out his threat.

"Do you think the kid will really blow the game on us?" he asked. "It *might* be only brag, you know. It takes a mighty plucky man sometimes to be a 'wrong' one."

"Judging by the state of his temper when he left me, I should think that there was every likelihood of his riding to the nearest depôt and giving away the lot of us," replied Dick.

Ned shook his head despondingly.

"It's a terrible pity you riled the coon. He's got consumption as it is, and I've heard tell that consumptive folk don't always know what they are doing. Better to have given the kid his jar, and

saved us a heap of trouble. It's a pity you didn't, Boss."

The rancher lifted his head with an action that showed how, when once his mind was decided, it would be difficult to divert it.

"No, Ned," he said quietly, but not without a hint of anger at the suggested opposition to his authority. "Not another drop of whisky shall Winton have from my ranch, though he be the means of sticking me in gaol for the rest of my life. Feed anyone else as much as ever you like. But I've been too careless with this chap as it is, and the next thing we shall see will be that youngster cantering down the same road that I travelled myself, only *he'll* come a cropper worse than I did, and never rise again. I have enough on my mind without piling on that extra weight."

"At least it could do no harm to drive over on the chance that he has put off the splitting till to-morrow?" urged Riley.

"It's not likely to do any good, but you are welcome to try your luck," returned the rancher. "But remember: fair play. There's to be no drinking, and no bullying. You may talk until you are blue in the face, if you like, but I'll have no other influence used. If he splits—well, I'll find some way to clear you fellows."

So Riley harnessed a quick trotter to the buggy, and started off on his mission,—but a large stone jar bearing the label "Noel Winton" was covertly taken from the out-house where Ethel Ross had stored it, and accompanied the cowboy in the vehicle.

* * * * *

Two days passed at the Westgarth ranch without any incidents taking place worth record. None of the men seemed to recover their wonted high spirits, and though Riley had reported a satisfactory interview with Winton, a general depression seemed to have fallen on all.

On the morning of the third day, however, while six o'clock breakfast was in progress, a diversion was caused by the arrival of Tom Gordon—one of a family of neighbouring ranchers who had a reputation (among right-minded people) almost on a par with the Westgarth crew. He was a man of about thirty years of age—a "Westerner" in every feature of dress and manner, and he rode a broncho that was popularly believed capable of scenting a mounted policeman at a mile's distance.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Dick, as the stranger cantered up to the shanty. "What ill wind blows you here at this hour? Tie up your nag and have some breakfast."

"Can't stop, Westgarth," Gordon replied, "I'm bound for town, but I thought you would like to know what's happened. It's young Winton—I've been with him these two days—he's dying this moment, if ever a man was!"

"Winton?" — "Dying?" — were the astounded exclamations from various throats.

Dick was the first to attempt a reasonable aspect.

"Nonsense," he said. "You're having a game with us. I saw Winton here three days ago, and then he was as lively as either you or I."

"And two days ago when I went to see him on—on

business," continued the rider, "I found him lying insensible in a pool of water, in one of his sheds. He must have been there for twenty-four hours, judging by appearances, but I could smell the drink on him even then."

"Drink?" echoed Westgarth. "It couldn't have been that. He must have fainted, or had some sort of fit."

"Pshaw!" interrupted Gordon contemptuously, in his turn. "Think I don't know the signs of drink by this time?"

"We all know that, worse luck," muttered the rancher to himself; then added aloud, "And what next?"

"Well, I managed to rouse the kid a bit, and lugged him along to his shanty, where I gave him a little something to put life into him. It didn't do him a scrap of good, though, and soon he began groaning and coughing and spitting up blood by the pint. Then I got sort of scared. I managed to undress him and get him into his bunk. After that I set off like blue lightning for the nearest shanty—the Steels', where the new pilot's putting up, you know. Before I'd half told my story, the gal stopped me. 'He ought not to be left alone, Mr. Gordon,' says she. 'Ride back as quickly as you can. I'll follow immediately.' And, boys, in less than no time she had hitched up her buggy and was rattling along the trail after me, without sparing an ounce of horseflesh, and carrying blankets and medicine and sick-food. He seemed to be better yesterday, but early this morning it seems the poor gal

must have dozed a bit, fagged out with two days' nursing and want of sleep, for she was wakened suddenly with a noise in the room. First she looked at the bed. That was empty. Then she hurried into the sort of parlour-place, and there she found Winton back at the whisky again, and as mad as could be. I was roused from my doze in the kitchen by hearing her cry out, and I came in just as she told him to get the whisky flask out of his hands. Luckily he was pretty weak with his illness, and between the two of us we managed to get him back to his bed. She gave him something to make him sleep (though I'm certain he's still mad), and then sent me off to Regina for Dr. Murray, for the boy's dying, Westgarth—dying as quickly as he can."

As the speaker finished his lengthy tale, Westgarth suddenly pushed back his chair and rose hurriedly.

"Do you mean to say that she—Miss Ross—is alone in the house with a drunken maniac! Man alive! her life is in danger." Then he turned to the cowboys. "Riley! Set the saddle on my mare, Bess, as quick as——" Here he stopped short, for he was addressing the air. There was no Riley in the room. He had slunk out unnoticed during the recital of the tale.

A flood of light suddenly flashed upon Dick's brain. He looked to where the stone jars usually stood. *The one with the label was absent.*

"Oh, heavens!" he cried hoarsely. "What is this we have done? Oh, poor Winton—poor chap! It is I who have killed you! It is I!"

Of course the onlookers did not understand the meaning of this change that had come upon their chief. They were not quick at reading riddles. Still they knew that a great blow had struck their hero of many daring deeds, and, although the words he spoke were an enigma, their rough hearts melted at the sight of their leader as they watched him bending under the weight of grief.

But Westgarth was a man of action, and natural instincts soon assert themselves. There was a deep sigh; a resigned movement of the head; then he was all action and energy once more.

"Hurry, Gordon!" he said. "Go to Dr. Murray as swift as ever you can. I'll give you a hundred dollars for every hour less than six that you can land him at Winton's. Tell him from me to arrange for a proper nurse to follow with everything that the boy needs as quickly as possible. He can look to me for the money, and Dr. Murray knows that Dick Westgarth is not stuck for a dollar or two. Now, off you go, and, if you ever hurried in your life, do so now!"

CHAPTER X.

THE NICK OF TIME.

GORDON needed no second bidding to the rancher's urgent appeal. A dig from the spurs, and the broncho darted towards the bush like an arrow from a bow.

Not another word spoke Westgarth to either Mutch or Shannon. He picked up his broad-brimmed felt hat and strode from the shanty. On reaching the stable, however, he heard a moan. Then, as he entered, he heard the words that never ceased to haunt him at intervals throughout his later life. Terrible words they were—wrung from the speaker's heart as his whole being strained on the rack of remorse :

"God, I haven't done much for You before ; but do this now for me : *take my useless life, but spare the boy's !* "

Dick stopped.

He had come out with the fixed intention of wreaking vengeance on the man who had wrought this great wrong, but his arm was stayed at this echo of what was in his own heart. He, too, had longed that his life might be given for Winton's.

"Ned," he said huskily, "this is a bad job for both of us. You and I are not up to much, after all, and we

thought a few hours ago that we were equal to any in the land."

Riley turned a haggard face to the speaker.

"Oh, Boss, it is all my fault—not yours! It was me took the whisky to him, in spite of you. I thought it was best—that it would save us."

"It's may-be saved *us*, but it has killed *him*," was the rejoinder. "But you needn't be so hard on yourself, Ned. I have been more to blame, for I have let him drink on, while I bled every cent. out of him since he came west. I might easily have refused him the stuff."

"What are you going to do?"

"First, try to move heaven and earth to save him, and after that—well, I don't see that it matters much what happens to me then. Saddle Bess for me, Ned. I must be off to Winton's ranch at once."

* * * * *

Surely the trial was enough to test the nerves of any woman! Tossing about on his bed, raving, struggling so that physical force was necessary to control him from harm, Winton was suffering from the combined effects of pleurisy and the delirium of drink. Sometimes he would scream out in terror as some mental horror attacked him; sometimes he would weep and moan that his soul was condemned to the pains of eternal punishment. But ever the burden of his ravings was the same: the cry for drink and his heaped curses on Dick Westgarth as the cause of all his troubles.

At long intervals there would be the calm of pure

exhaustion. Such respites Ethel Ross would spend on her knees praying the Father of all to save the soul of this poor boy, and to give her strength to do her duty. But the intervals of rest were brief, and the struggle was soon renewed with all the vigour of the madman's abnormal strength.

To her mind the story was plain enough: in spite of her artifice, Westgarth had managed to find spirits with which to feed the youth's craving for liquor. No doubt her trick had been discovered, she told herself, and the harmless tea replaced by the deadly fire-water. In the parlour was the jar (this half a gallon) which she had had such difficulty to wrest from the maniac's hands in the early morning before Tom Gordon had come to her aid. Truly it was enough to dishearten the most persevering; and once more she prayed: "Father, Thou hast set me this work to do. Give me strength to carry on the fight to the end!"

Owing partly to the want of rest after a long continued strain, and partly to an unusually prolonged period of exhaustion on the part of the patient, Ethel was once tempted for a moment to relax the extreme vigilance that she had hitherto considered necessary.

She moved almost noiselessly from the bed to look out of the window across the prairie in order to see if there was any hope of brief relief from her vigil. But no sooner was her back turned to the bed than Winton leapt out to the middle of the floor. The girl faced about immediately. Evidently the man was about to make for the parlour again with the intention of regaining the spirit jar, and without pausing to consider

the danger she at once determined to prevent him from carrying out his intention.

With a slight cry she attempted to intercept him, but the madman evidently misinterpreted her action in his disordered brain, understanding the movement for a personal attack, and uttering a horrible cry, he raised a heavy chair and swung it over his head.

Unable to defend herself, and feeling that her last moment had come, Ethel's fear overcame her, and she sank on her knees before the demoniacal fury, and held up her arms (poor weak shield) to protect her head from the terrible blow about to crash upon her. But just as the chair was poised in mid-air, another cry was heard, and an arm was thrown round the madman's neck from behind, bearing him backwards. The chair fell with a clatter to the ground, and when the girl had strength enough to look up, she saw two men—Winton, the madman, and the "traitor" Westgarth—struggling together violently on the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

"NO LOVE STORY."

THE struggle between the delirious youth and Ethel's preserver was not a long one, though it was desperate. The stranger had the advantage of health, although madness had lent almost superhuman power to Winton. But suddenly there was a cessation of struggling, and Dick Westgarth stood up, hot and trembling, and bore a helpless burden to the bed.

Not a word did Dick and Ethel exchange while the coverings were being smoothed, and a composing draught being administered.

Then with tears in her eyes and lips trembling with emotion, the girl turned to the man and held out her hand to him.

A strange light of happiness flashed into the rancher's eyes. He raised his arm to meet the hand-clasp, but before their fingers met he suddenly snatched his hand away, and took a step further aside.

"No! No!" he cried, and the words were wrung from right out of his heart. "I am not fit to touch your hand in the clasp of friendship. Don't tempt me, Miss Ross, for I may not have the strength that I need!"

Ethel was naturally astonished at such strange

behaviour, but she could not fail to experience a certain degree of satisfaction, for she interpreted his conduct as the touch of conscience for the evil he had done by furnishing the liquor that was the cause of the boy's present condition. At the same time he had just saved her life, and whatever her feelings might be on other matters, she could hardly fail to be grateful for that service.

"May I not offer my hand to the one to whom I owe my life?" she asked, with a sad smile. "It is surely a little enough mark of my gratitude."

"It was a slight enough service," was the answer.

He still made no advance to accept the offer. "Any man coming in by accident as I did would have given equal service."

"Does that make it any the less valuable?"

"To the receiver—perhaps not; but one giver might not be so worthy of thanks as another. It is not necessary to pay one for doing his duty."

Ethel smiled gently, and a look of sympathy filled her eyes, so that his dropped before the light.

"I think I understand you, Mr. Westgarth, so I will not press you. But, believe me, you have done to-day what I shall never forget as long as I have memory. Whatever you may do in the future, whatever others say of you, I will always remember you as a brave man—one from whom I shall expect to see a life of greater bravery still."

There was a certain stress laid upon the last words that gave them a significance that the rancher could not but understand.

His face flushed with self-consciousness, but Ethel delicately turned to occupy herself with some trifling matters concerning the invalid.

A silence of considerable duration followed. Ethel continued to be absorbed with an affectation of interest in slight tidying affairs such as women know so well how to assume on occasion. The man stood with arms folded and head bent, while his thoughts moulded themselves into a decided form. The youth was resting peacefully under the influence of the sedative recently administered.

Presently Dick spoke. It was the dull, sad tone as of one who was conversing with the ghost of his past.

"Miss Ross, would you consider it an impertinence if I asked you a question of a very personal nature?"

"I think not," the girl replied, with face still carefully averted. "I am sure you would not ask me any question that would be unbecoming from a gentleman."

"Not ungentlemanly," he said. "Still, you might regard it as impertinent."

"Perhaps I will be better able to judge when I have heard what you wish to say."

The man seemed to gather courage from the girl's quiet tones, so he was encouraged to continue.

"It is not so very terrible. I—I was merely going to ask your age."

A ghost of a smile of amusement lit up Ethel's face as she turned to the speaker for a moment.

"Is that all? I certainly anticipated something much more difficult to answer. I am twenty-five."

"Ah—twenty-five," Dick repeated thoughtfully. "And I suppose in all these twenty-five years you never did an act or expressed a thought for which you earned the contempt of your friends, and, what is harder still to bear, the contempt of self?"

"I think I may truly say that I have not," the other returned.

"If you had, these twenty-five years would press upon your heart like two score of leaden weights, would they not?"

"I believe they would," answered Ethel with a sigh. "But why let us think of such unhappy thoughts? Have we not sad enough sights before us that we need phantasies?"

"Because these are no phantasies," answered Dick impetuously. "These are terrible realities—to me. Thank God, *you* have not one ounce of sin with which to gauge my weight of years." Then he let his voice fall still lower, and it was rich with the intensity of human passion. "Three days ago, Miss Ross, I met the first good woman who has crossed my life since my mother shared it. No," he added hastily, as an apprehensive look of pain became visible in the girl's face—"no, please don't misunderstand me. This is no love story that I am going to tell you. All I want to say is, that when I saw that good woman, I saw myself as I really was. Oh, how different from what I had imagined myself to be! That is all. But I want you to know this, so that perhaps in years to come you may look back and feel pleased to think that your mission was not *all* in vain. You caused one bad man to hold

up the mirror to his soul, and he saw the blackness therein—nothing but blackness."

As Dick Westgarth had been speaking, Ethel had gradually come towards him as if the words had owned some magnetic power; and, as he ceased, she forced forward her arms pleadingly.

"Oh, Mr. Westgarth, is it too late to retrieve? Does the Father ever refuse pardon to His sinful child, no matter how deeply he has grieved Him?"

The rancher uttered a slight laugh of scorn.

"There your argument is faulty, Miss Ross, as I fear (don't think I mean to pain you) all such arguments are when put to practical tests. *My* father was not so ready to forgive."

"Are you sure you ever asked him?" returned the girl.

Dick started at the straight unequivocal question. He had not expected it, and the force of it came to him with doubled energy in consequence. He knew only too well how his impetuous pride had steadfastly refused to humble itself, in spite of the yearnings of nature during the early years of his exile, and he realised how in later times the weeds of habit had nearly choked all tender possibilities.

"Are you sure you ever asked him?" the girl had said, and his eyes gave a clear enough negative, though his lips did not move.

"I will not ask you to take my hand now," said Ethel kindly. "Not that I do not think you merit it but because the first necessity has passed. But there will come a day—not very far distant, I hope—when



"OH! MR. WESTGARTH, IS IT TOO LATE TO RETRIEVE?"

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you will tell me that you *have* done your duty to the Father of all fathers—Him you will have asked for pardon. Then—then I will beg you on my knees to clasp my hand as a pledge of the New Life that you have entered and mean to live."

Just then the patient began to move, and slightly resume his earlier restlessness, and all attention had to be given to his needs until the arrival of more competent medical aid.

CHAPTER XII.

A LITTLE LIGHT.

WHEN the doctor arrived (within five hours!) he pronounced the case to be one of the utmost seriousness, though not necessarily hopeless. The young man's constitution (not at any time robust) had been considerably weakened by a systematic course of dissipation, but if he could once pull through the crisis, the wonderful Canadian climate would probably assert itself and prove a master physician to the congenital weakness—provided no more liquor was indulged in.

Doctor Murray had brought with him a Mrs. Lander, who was a matronly nurse of the right sort—experienced, kind, indulgent when necessary, though equally rigid in regard to medical instructions. Powerful in muscle, there was no need to fear that the patient would get the upper hand as he had done when under the sole supervision of poor Ethel.

When the doctor had made his examination, and departed for town again (he had some thirty miles to drive), Mrs. Lander's first act was to make the bedroom ship-shape for convenient nursing. Gordon and Westgarth had also taken their departure, though the latter had promised to return early in the morning

to do the odd jobs. So the two women were left in charge to carry out the medical instructions to the best of their ability.

The house, consisting of two bedrooms, a parlour, and a kitchen, was a fairly large one for the time and place. Having a liberal allowance from his widowed mother in England, Winton had furnished it comfortably, and with a considerable evidence of refinement. But it had evidently been neglected for some time, and was calculated to demand much application of the house-wife's broom before it would satisfy a woman's requirements.

In almost every corner and recess, bottles and jars were brought to light—eloquent evidences of the terrible extent to which the boy had been carrying his besetting sin. All were dry, except the flask in the parlour. This Mrs. Lander deliberately emptied out of the nearest window.

"He'll get no more out of *that* flask," she said to Miss Ross. "I don't hold with children playing with gunpowder. Now we'll make a heap of all these bottles and jars, and when Mr. Westgarth comes in the morning, he'll break up the lot."

It was evening before the housewifely duties were satisfactorily accomplished. The patient had been comparatively docile, though his mind was still wandering.

In order that Ethel might have the rest that she so sorely needed, it had been arranged that Mrs. Lander should take the first watch of the night until about two o'clock the next morning.

The girl was very tired. She had been unable to sleep during the day, though she had made the attempt more than once; but, when nine o'clock came, no sooner had she rested her head on the pillow in the second bedroom than she fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion.

It was three o'clock before Mrs. Lander could bring herself to waken Ethel, who seemed to be enjoying such perfect rest. But it was imperative that neither nurse should over-exert herself, as the work was likely to be prolonged, and would require a good reserve of strength to cope with the strain.

When Ethel took her place in the sick-room the patient was resting quietly, except for occasional moans and incoherent mutterings. A shaded night-light was burning on the table at the head of the bed, and she drew her chair close so as to be in readiness to render any possible aid to ease the patient's sufferings.

It was with feelings of intense sorrow that she looked upon the flushed face, as Winton slowly moved his head with a regular motion from side to side. It was a handsome face—quite the face of a boy, but it was drawn and pinched with the wear of hard living.

Soon he began to talk again more loudly, and this time the words began to link themselves into understandable phrases, though much disjointed. At first Ethel could only distinguish the words "mother," "home," and a few others which shewed where the sufferer's mind was wandering at the time. Then he seemed to become more excited, and with the excitement the words came more rapidly and coherently.

"Westgarth—the whisky—Westgarth," he said.

"Hush!" said the girl quietly, at the same time laying her cool hand soothingly on his forehead. "Try to sleep. You will be better if you do."

The sick man caught at the last words, but they had a different connection in his mind than with sleep.

"Better? Yes, better, Riley—quite right—whisky is better than telling police. But tell Westgarth I've got it, for he must think me a fool—Ha! ha! I've got the whisky in spite of old Dick!—I love you for it, Riley!" There was a big interval of silence. Then he resumed, though in a different tone—"Right, mother—I'll not drink in Canada.—Why, what's this!—Tea?—Riley! Riley—He's cheated me—he shan't—yes, mother, I promise, and I'll come back—Hullo, Gordon! thank Heaven I can get a drink—Riley thought he'd cheat me out of it—mean skunk!"

"So it was from Gordon he got the drink, not Dick Westgarth?" was the glad thought that flashed into Ethel's mind as she listened to the ravings of the youth.

Words could not say how thankful she was to learn the truth, and to know that Dick was not so evil as she had been forced to believe. All she could do was to bow her head in gratitude and say from the depths of her heart: "I thank Thee, God!"

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE BEHIND BARS.

WHILE Ethel's head was bent and her eyes closed in prayer by Winton's bedside, a different voice from that which had been breaking so discordantly on the silence of the early hours suddenly spoke from the bed.

"Who are you?"

Ethel raised her head quickly. Winton had turned his face towards her on the pillow. His eyes were wide open with wonder and his lips were twitching nervously. But the voice that had asked the question was not the unmistakable voice of delirium. It was one of the brief intervals of sanity that so frequently break in upon the wildness of such attacks.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" he repeated in the same calm, though weakly expressionless tone.

"Hush; you must try to sleep and not speak. I am Ethel Ross—a friend. I have come to nurse you because you have been ill. But you must not ask any questions. Try to sleep, and you will soon be well again."

Winton tried to obey, but he soon opened his eyes again.

"Why do you say that? You know that I will *not* be better soon. I know it, because I can feel terrible pain. Am I going to die?"

Ethel was not a "trained" nurse, and consequently she had to rely upon her good sense to guide her at such a time.

If he is clear enough to ask the question, he is clear enough to understand the truth, she argued. So she told the truth. "No, I do not think you will die, Mr. Winton, but you will find the struggle a difficult one. You are very ill; but you must not be afraid. You are in loving hands that will not leave you for a moment until you are well again. Now try to sleep, and not worry. Shut your eyes and try to believe that God, our Father, is with you, and He knows what is best."

The boy did close his eyes, but only to open them quickly again. He moved slightly towards his nurse, whose hand had never left his brow.

"If—if I should die—will you make me a promise?" he asked hoarsely. "Please don't put me off! I must ask you, and I must have your promise!"

"I will try," said the girl, gently.

"Then promise—if I die—you will find Dick Westgarth. Tell him that I was sorry for what I said. He tried to save me from the drink that night, but I wouldn't be saved, and I got it from Tom Gordon. But Dick tried—and I cursed him for it—he tried to make me keep my word to my mother—poor old mother! Will you promise?"

"I promise," was the reply, though the tears were

streaming from her eyes, and the words were half choked in the uttering.

The boy gave a sigh of contentment.

"Please keep your hand on my head!" he said, as he closed his eyes once more. "It feels—like—home. Please stay with me! Yes—God knows best! God knows best." And with those blessed words on his lips, the racked brain found its rest in peaceful sleep.

* * * * *

Noel Winton's illness lasted many weeks before it might be safely said that his recovery was assured. During this period it was Dick Westgarth's custom to ride over to the ranch each morning and evening to do the odd jobs around the house, and also to procure such things as Ethel Ross and Mrs. Lander might require from the local store at the Gordons' or from Regina.

Mrs. Lander had proved herself to be an excellent nurse, and Ethel was an able lieutenant in carrying out instructions.

As Winton became more rational, the exigencies of health demanded that each of the nurses should have stated periods of rest in the fresh air in order to recuperate the strength that had been considerably sapped by the strain of long attention in the sick-room. These outings also became Dick's special care, and, with the exception of such times as when he was prevented by compulsory duties elsewhere, he and his buggy were in attendance on the two nurses for a few hours each day.

Consequently it might be said with fairness that

Dick Westgarth shared largely in the nursing of the boy. His hand it was that penned the lengthy weekly letter to Mrs. Winton in England, giving a detailed account of her son's progress; his hand it was that ordered from the eastern cities the delicacies that were unprocurable in the west, and that the doctor considered essential for the patient's recovery; and his hand it was that added up the long bills each week, and signed the cheques in payment thereof. He had insisted upon the latter responsibility in particular, though one day when Ethel was driving with him for her customary airing, the girl ventured to suggest that he might be over-reaching the limit of justice by undertaking all these heavy expenses.

But Dick was obdurate.

"Surely it is little enough when one has given the poison to give the antidote as well?" he said simply.

Then Ethel saw that the rancher was totally ignorant of the part Gordon's whisky had played in causing the boy's illness and of the trick she had made in the substitution of tea for spirits. So she told him the whole tale, not omitting that part which dealt with Winton's admissions during his illness.

As she related the story a cloud seemed to be gradually lifted from the hearer's face, and when it came to Winton's message—when he begged Ethel in the event of death to tell Dick of his sorrow at not having taken the advice of the older man—then his face lit up with an intensity of gladness that would be difficult to describe.

"Oh, Miss Ross, you can never know what a load

you have lifted from my mind! How can I—how can we all ever thank you enough for what you have done for each one of us?"

"By joining in the fight against the traffic that has brought you so much sorrow!" was the immediate response.

So ready, so apt, so natural, and withal so totally unexpected was the reply, that it took Dick's breath away, as the saying tersely expresses the thought.

"*I—join the fight?*" he gasped, repeating the girl's expression.

"And why not?" asked Ethel. "Think what it would be if only your example was on our side instead of supporting the traffic."

"But you are mistaken, Miss Ross," said Dick. "I pledge you my word that since the day when you offered me your hand to clasp by the sick-bed of poor Winton—I give you my word that not a drop of spirits has crossed my lips, nor has a flask touched my hands."

"That is noble—very noble of you, Mr. Westgarth!" Ethel said, turning in the buggy towards her companion, and looking her appreciation. "But—is it—to end there?"

Dick met the look, and a fierce impulse came over him then to pour out the story of the happy trouble that had grown upon him since that day when a certain person first visited a miserable rancher's shanty. He returned Ethel's look of appreciation with a hungry, passionate gaze, as if his soul were swelling over its confines, and she, feeling the truth flash upon her, bent before the fierce blaze.

"Miss Ross—Ethel!" he cried, grasping with his left hand one of hers that was near. "*Don't you know? Can't you see?*"

Ethel did not answer at once, but she looked up again into the man's face. What did she see there? Love? Yes, love was there, but the poor imprisoned child was weeping behind a barrier of the painful knowledge of his own unfitness. He knew that he was unworthy.

Quietly Dick released the tiny hand that he had been fiercely crushing, and looked steadily before him at the horse jogging along the trail with its regular trot-trot, heedless of the drama that was taking place behind.

"You will pardon me, Miss Ross," he said very quietly. "I understand. We will say no more. Some day, perhaps——."

"Yes—some day?"

"Some day—when things are different, I may speak again. But—not—now."

The girl stifled a sob before she could speak, and then it was only in broken tones.

"Yes, some day—it may be quite—different. You are a brave man, Mr. Westgarth—you can conquer—*anything*—if you try."

Westgarth gave a slight laugh meant to imply the impracticability of the suggestion.

"It sounds easy, Miss Ross, and to you—to most women—it would be easy enough. But think what I would have to contend with if I were to set up as a saint. You have little knowledge of men, Miss Ross

if you think the task so easily accomplished. Not that I mean to imply that something might not be done."

"And you will do it?" asked Ethel, eagerly.

"I can promise nothing," the rancher returned seriously. "As yet I do not know my own strength. Probably I should be a dismal failure and the laughing stock of the whole district in consequence."

"I do not think there are many who would dare to laugh openly at you, Mr. Westgarth," said the girl. "They might (probably would at first) do so secretly, though in time they would forget even that. It is worth the trying."

"Perhaps—perhaps it is," said the rancher, thoughtfully. And nothing further was said on the subject until the house was just at hand. Then Dick turned to his companion and spoke quickly and earnestly.

"Miss Ross—pardon me for touching the subject again, as I know it pains you—but if—*if* I were to try to do this thing that you wish; if I were to try hard, even though I failed—*might* things be different between us then?"

"If you told me that you had tried, not because it was my wish only, but because you were doing what you believed to be right—perhaps, in time, it might be as you desired," replied the girl, simply.

"Thank you," was the man's rejoinder—only two words, but to Ethel's ears they conveyed all the strength of a solemn vow; all the music of future hope for her happiness.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN GORDON'S STORE.

IN prairie districts, where newspapers are few and distances great, the general centre for the collection and distribution of gossip is the nearest "store."

The Gordons, who added a shop-keeping source of income to the other resources of a ranch, owned the nearest general store in the Westgarth district. It was the "Universal Provider" for a radius of ten miles, and here it was the custom for the neighbouring ranchers to foregather on mail-days to exchange items of news, as well as to receive letters.

Old Seth Gordon, the father of a family of three rascally sons, was the head of the firm. He was generally reputed to be a millionaire, and he shared with Dick Westgarth the honour of having smuggled more whisky from the States into Canada than any other two men in the North-west Territories.

"I suppose you're going to retire soon?" remarked a facetious rancher to Seth on one of the mail-days, when the latter was occupied with sorting the letters.

"Guess I'll wait till I've skinned the last red cent. from you!" snapped the grey-bearded store-keeper as he looked up from his task for a moment, and blinked

his white, cunning eyes under the eaves of overhanging eyebrows.

One of the onlookers (Ned Riley, to be exact) who happened to be nearest the store-keeper at the time, and who stood least in awe of his coarse wit, turned upon the old man sharply.

"Come on, Seth! There's no call to insult a man because he jokes with you. We all know that you'd get the skin off a flint stone, if you could. So fork out the letters, and be civil!"

Old Gordon frowned, but he stood somewhat in dread of Ned, who knew so many of his secrets. "There's no need to get your back up, Ned," he said in more conciliatory tones. "But I've got enough to worry me now without these fellows' chaff."

"What? Mounted police on the ferret again?" asked a bystander. To which Seth replied contemptuously:

"Police! What do I care for them? No, its West-garth. He and I were to do a deal across the line some weeks ago, and it's never come off yet, and I don't believe it ever will, either, and there's two hundred dollars apiece clean thrown away. Then he writes me a letter yesterday, daring me even to sell another drop of stuff to young Winton, and he says that if I do he'll split to the police."

A general murmur of surprise ran round the store at this announcement.

"If he splits on you, he'll hardly be able to wriggle out himself," suggested one present, to which Riley retorted, staunch to his chief: "I guess Dick knows

his own business better than you or me. I don't pretend to know why he wrote that to Seth, but I reckon if he said so we'd better all look out."

"Bye-the-way," remarked one of the men who lived on a rather remote section, "what's become of our little pilot? I ain't seen her about for weeks, and she used to often drop in for a chat with the wife and me. Has she given us up for a bad job?"

"Not she," another joined in. "Miss Ross isn't one of the kind that gives in easily. Haven't you heard that she's been nursing young Winton all this time?"

"No! Has she, though?" exclaimed the first questioner.

"That she has," replied Riley. "She's been sticking to it like a badger—nothing would take her away from the ranch, she told Westgarth, until she'd seen the kid through with it."

"Bully for her!" was the enthusiastic appreciation of another of those present. "Now that's what I call doing the thing properly."

"She's a dandy!" exclaimed one.

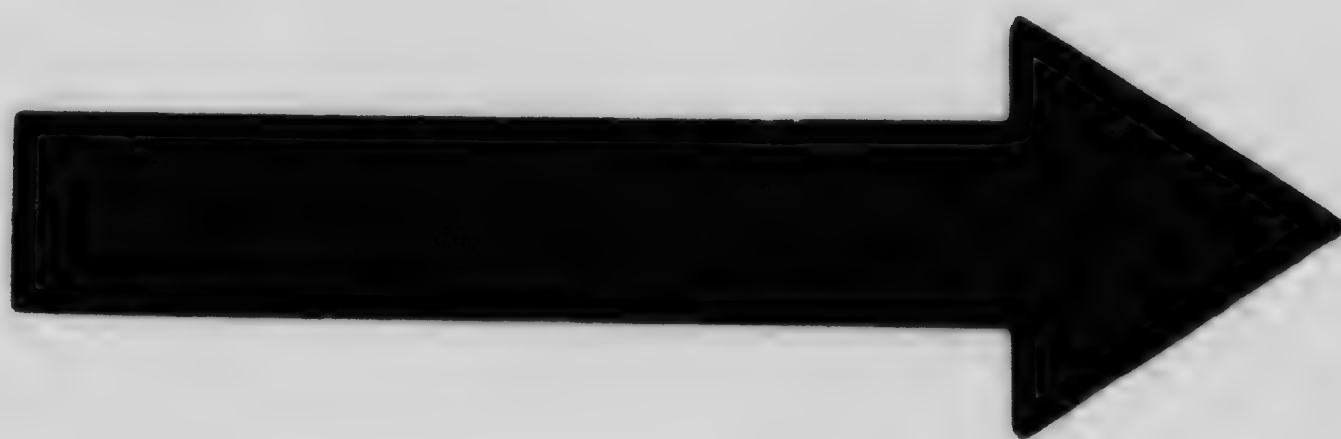
"A pilot of the right sort!" added another.

"One who knows when to speak, and when to act!" said a third.

Then Riley, who had waxed enthusiastic, called out:

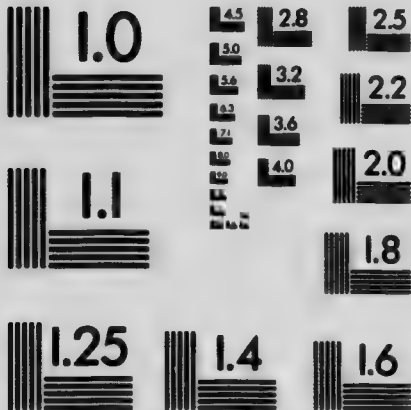
"Boys! we ought to do something for this girl. She's no ordinary sort, and we ought to show her how glad we are to have her out here."

"She jawed me near an hour one day about selling whisky to you boys," growled Seth, who had at last begun to distribute the mail.



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"Well, I don't see that it did you any harm," answered Ned. "We all do heaps of things that we oughtn't, and if we weren't told about it now and then we might do worse without thinking. But what about this testimonial, boys? It ought to be something slap-up good from the whole of us."

"I propose taking up a collection and sending her a tip-top buggy with the best broncho in the district hitched on to it," suggested one.

"Not bad," assented Ned; "but, you see, a horse and buggy ain't the sort of thing she can have always with her wherever she goes to remind her of us."

"What do you say to a clock—one of those gold things, with a skittish broncho on the top and a glass case to keep it in?" was another suggestion.

"Too flashy," was Ned's decision. "She's not the sort that goes in for shiny things. Besides, that'd be a big thing to carry about."

"How would it be," said the quiet man on the sugar barrel, "to write and tell her that a lot of us want to do something right handsome, and ask her to choose what she'd like best?"

A chorus of acclamations greeted this idea.

"Bully for you!" exclaimed one. "See, Ned, you're a good hand with the pen. Get a sheet of paper and an envelope from Seth and do the job right now. It can go up with the mails. Seth'll let you use his parlour for five minutes. And tell her to reply at once so that we can get about the job immediately."

In accordance with this request (and Gordon's gracious permission) Ned Riley retired from public

view to the back parlour, armed with the necessary implements for literary work, and in about twenty minutes returned and read the folio wing to a breathlessly attentive audience :

Dear Miss,—There's some of us boys want badly to give you a present just to show you that we like having you coming in and out of our ranches, and because you have been an out and out daisy to young Winton. We don't know for the life of us what you'd like best to have—a buggy or a clock—but if you'll just give it a name as soon as you get this, even though it's a grand piano with gold legs, we'll send it along right slick, and no mistake about it. I sign myself in the name of all the boys,

“Yours respectfully,

“NED RILEY.”

“P.S.—Please send the message to Gordon's store as soon as you can, as we'll be meeting there to-morrow night to talk it over.

“How's that?” Ned asked when he had finished the reading.

“It's just a rattler; that's what it is,” was the general comment expressed in that and other colloquial forms of speech.

So the letter was sealed in its envelope, and placed with the rest of the Winton's ranch mail, for which Westgarth would call during the day according to his recent custom.

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING THE REPLY.

ON the evening following that on which Ned Riley's letter was dispatched to Ethel, the cowboys gathered early at Gordon's store.

All who had been present on the previous day reappeared on this second occasion, as well as many others who had heard of the proposed compliment to the "pilot," and desired to participate in the event. In all, there must have been some thirty men present, and the store (no vast structure) was soon filled with clouds of tobacco smoke, and as noisy as a *conversazione*.

As each arrived, the question was put to Seth :

"Any answer, boss?"

But their hearts fell when the reply was a shake of the head from the old store-keeper and each neighbour who heard the query.

"Perhaps she's too busy——"

"Or has forgotten——"

"Or is offended——"

Ned, in particular, was greatly disappointed. He had put his best work into the composition of the letter, and he was badly hurt at the thought that his best intentions had been slighted.

"Perhaps the letter wasn't just up to the mark," he

lately suggested. "I suppose the people she gets letters from have fine ways of saying things that we don't know of, and maybe my writing was not *At*."

A cough from Binning drew attention to his presence on the accustomed pedestal.

"'Tisn't that," he said. "'Tisn't the wording, nor yet the writing. You take my word for that. Miss Ross knows well enough that we don't pretend to be what we're not, and she doesn't expect us to have the education that she's got. But you can bet your bottom dollar that she would understand right enough that we meant kindly, even though we couldn't write it like a book. Yes, sir, you take my word for it: Miss Ross doesn't mean any unkindness to us, whatever it may seem. Let's just wait a bit, and we'll find out in time."

This half explanation relieved the tension meanwhile, and the conversation began to drift into general channels. Then a dry snarling cough followed, and Seth Gordon peeped his grey head and cynical face with its goat's beard appendage over the little partition in the corner that was dignified with the name of "office."

"I guess you don't none of you know gals—leastways gals when they're in love, if them's your sentiments," he sneered. "Miss Ross ain't got no time to spare 'ou boys when Dick Westgarth's to the fore. When a woman's on the trail of a man, don't you reckon, Shannon, it's a poor look-out for the rest of us?"

"Dry up, you old croaker!" was the polite comment from Mutch, who happened to be nearest to the partition. "You'd have us all think we were as bad as

yourself. I don't suppose you ever loved anything in the world except your whisky?"

"'Taint the whisky by a long chalk," replied Seth, with a wag of his head. "It's the dollars that silly coons gives me for the rye that goes into my heart."

"There I believe you," said Riley. "You'd sell your own flesh and blood for a five cent. piece."

"Wrong again," answered the old man, blinking his steely eyes from under the hedges of grey hair towards the speaker. "Make it five dollars, and I won't say but what you're in the wolf's track. But it's a pity to bite the hand that feeds you, Ned. Many's the drop you've had in my store, and many's the drop you'll want again, and don't you forget it. But hanged if I can see what all this cross talk has got to do with the pilot. I was asking Ab. Shannon a polite question when you chipped in with your jaw, Mutch."

"And would you like an answer?" asked Shannon, rousing himself from his seat on the counter to take a first interest in the interrogator.

"If you can climb down from your perch, and favour us common folk with a few words of wisdom, we'd be mighty grateful," was the sneering reply.

Ab. did climb down, and striding quickly across the store, he gripped the old man's "goatee" that hung over the edge of the counter and tugged it from side to side with an energy that caused its owner to yell with pain.

"Then here's your answer, you skunk!" exclaimed Shannon. "Let me hear so much as another word from your vile tongue against our little pilot, and I tear

every hair from this mangy beard, and then souse your ugly carcass in the nearest tar barrel."

The store-keeper quickly subsided behind his partition after this energetic form of conversation. And just then the door opened, and Ethel Ross stepped into the centre of the apartment.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ANSWER TO THE LETTER.

IMMEDIATELY there was a cessation of the talking. Pipes were taken out of mouths, and loungers slipped from their perches and stood erect at the dictate of instinctive gentility. But no one spoke. All stared at the white smiling apparition in their midst, but none was bold enough to be the first to break the silence.

Managing to discern Ned Riley amid the clouds of smoke, Ethel turned to him and held out her hand.

"Good evening, Mr. Riley," she said. "I have come to thank you personally for your very kind note and the offer it contained from so many of my friends."

Ned blushed as red as a ripe tomato.

"We're glad to see you, miss. We were almost thinking that you had forgotten all about it, being busy-like."

Ethel opened her eyes wide with astonishment.

"Forgotten?" she repeated. "How *could* I forget when a friend writes to me? Indeed, so well did I remember, that I have not been able to think of anything else all day. To tell you the truth" (here she gave a comprehensive glance to all the bystanders)

"when first I read the letter, what do you think I did? You'll never guess."

"Laughed," said one; and another (with a touch of humour in his composition), "Burned it."

"No," said the young lady. "I didn't laugh, because the matter was too serious. I didn't burn it, because—here it is!" And she pulled the crumpled envelope out from the bosom of her dress.

A murmur of delight ran through the store at this evidence of the girl's real appreciation of the letter and the message it contained. Then the visitor continued.

"Well, when I got that letter, I—just sat down and had a good cry!"

"Cry?" came from a chorus of hoarse throats.

"Yes, cry," the girl repeated. "Don't you see how it was? Here have I been scolding you all for months; interfering with you when you thought I had no business; lecturing you because of the drink; and making you hate me instead of turning you into friends. Everything that you have been led to consider as just and right, I have been condemning. I have scolded you for not going to church—indeed, it seemed as if I were never going to be able to find anything to praise; and of course I knew that you must all think me dreadfully meddling. You know how I have been busy for some time at Mr. Winton's ranch, and consequently unable to see much of you all lately. But he is nearly better now, and yesterday I was turning over in my mind how I was to resume my work, and try once more to make friends with you. Well, do you know, when I began

to think it over, I remembered all my past failures, and I felt so disheartened and despairing that I did not know what to do. And just then—just when everything seemed so dark and miserable—here came your letter so full of friendship; showing me how mistaken I was, and telling me that you were my friends after all. Oh, it was the happiest moment of my life! Then I sat down and had a good long cry. Just like a woman, wasn't it?"

A flickering smile passed over the men's faces as a reflection of Ethel's own when she asked the last question.

"We thought that the letter was not good enough," said Riley, apologetically, whereupon Ethel turned to him kindly—

"Do not say that, please! It was a priceless letter—to me, and I will keep it all my life. Whenever I am beginning to feel disheartened in my work, I will take out that letter and read it, and remember how 'God moves in a mysterious way.'"

"And what about the answer?" Seth Gordon ventured to ask. He was not over bold to speak, recalling vividly the little difference he had had with the girl.

"That is just what I came to see you all about," she hastened to explain. "I thought about it all through yesterday, and I have been thinking about it all to-day."

"But you are agreeable to what we want to do?" interposed Ned.

Ethel Ross was thoughtful for a few moments.

"I have decided what I should like best," she began



"WE'LL DO IT! WE'VE GIVEN OUR
WORDS AND WILL STICK TO
THEM!"

hesitatingly. But it will cost a good deal—not in money, but in—in other ways.”

“Just as much as hint at it, miss, and it's yours!” exclaimed an enthusiastic onlooker. And Ethel resumed—

“Let us be quite clear, then, so as to avoid any misunderstanding,” she said. “What I understand is simply this: whatever I ask, you will do it for me—if it be within your power to do so?”

“That's right. You've got it down to the ground,” came an answer from many parts.

Again Ethel hesitated.

“Suppose I were to ask you—something that would be very difficult for you to give; something that would inconvenience you a great deal?”

“We'll do it!” Ned assured her for the others, and was backed by innumerable “Yeses.”

“Then, friends” (and the speaker stood up straight, hesitating no longer, and looked at the thirty boys grouped around her)—“then, if you really mean what you say, and sincerely desire to give me pleasure—then will you everyone of you give me your word that you will not buy, sell, or taste strong drink for three months from this day? and more—I have asked a minister to come out once a week and hold a short service in Mr. Westgarth's barn (he has given permission); so, if you are in earnest about what you say you will promise also to attend that service on Sunday mornings during these three months. Now, will you?”

It was a hard question, and Ethel did not expect a spontaneous or immediate reply; so, while the men

were thinking about the question (some discussing with each other the unexpected nature of the request, and the difficulty of fulfilling it) she determined not to miss the opportunity of striking while the iron was hot.

"Come, friends, you know that I do not like what you call 'preaching' to you. At the same time you know as well as I do that the liquor traffic is ruining your ranches and spoiling the colony. You know also (although many are afraid to admit it for fear of being laughed at) that there is a God, and if there is a God, you know that you ought to serve Him. You who are married and have families—how would you like it if your children were never to come to you for advice; never to tell you of their hopes in life; never to come to you for comfort in their hours of trouble; never to come to you for sympathy in their times of joy? You know that you would resent it. Such conduct—to be separated as it were from those whom you hold dearest in life—would break your hearts;—you know it would. Well, I believe that that is how He feels about us in this colony. He is not angry, but He is sorry—ever so sorry!"

There was a passion of tearful appeal in Ethel's words that struck deeply into the hearts of the cowboys, and a sudden burst of sound followed when she ceased.

"We'll do it! We'll do it!" they cried. "We've given our words, and we'll stick to them!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A SNAKE IN EDEN.

THAT friendly gathering in Gordon's store marked the beginning of an era of prosperity in the Qu'appelle Valley and the surrounding prairie district.

Three months of practical abstinence proved to the majority that they *could* manage to exist on the natural produce of their farms, and, although one or two men were disheartening failures, the others stuck faithfully to their promise.

The Rev. Alfred Bray was a signal success. After the first few weeks of his prairie ministry in Westgarth's barn, his congregation began to grow appreciably. He was the first formal preacher who had been tolerated in the district, and the cowboys were surprised to find that, instead of hearing "hog-wash" (as they coarsely, though expressively designated inane preaching), he gave them plain addresses on homely subjects in a frank manner that strongly appealed to their rough hearts.

Of course Ethel's share in these services consisted mainly in leading the music with her beautiful voice, aided by a portable harmonium. Often, too, she varied the meeting by singing one or more of the old hymns that one usually associates with the home of youth,

when a mother's voice had sung the strains to soothe boyhood's tears. In the after-discussions, however, the girl was at liberty to take a more definite share, and frequently her womanly sympathy elicited confidences such as only feminine lives know how to coax, and there were few who did not, at some time, seek her advice.

At first these services in the barn were attended by the men only, for whom they had been primarily arranged. But gradually the wives and children of the ranchers began to show a waking interest in the novelty, until, in about two months, the attendance became so large that the necessity for securing a larger building grew pressing. Clearly, Ethel Ross would soon see the realisation of her dreams—a proper church, with its own pastor, planted as the first flower in a neglected wilderness.

Throughout all these proceedings, Dick Westgarth had been a sort of right-hand man to be relied on at all times when a man's mind was essential. Noel Winton had so far recovered as to be able to dispense with the nursing services of both Mrs. Lander and Miss Ross—the latter having, for some time, returned to her temporary home with the Steeles. He was not, however, quite fit for out-of-door labour even of the lightest description, and, although an efficient worker had been hired for the more laborious duties, Dick took up his residence with the lad in order to supervise matters generally, as well as to keep an eye on his health until he was completely convalescent.

The result of these arrangements was that a strong attachment sprang up between the two—one of those

deep friendships of natural brotherhood which is so beautiful, though unfortunately so rare. Noel idolised Dick, whilst Westgarth's attitude was the ideal of what an elder brother's love should be.

This state of affairs was fortunate for both persons concerned. Westgarth was capable of much nobility when he had a good purpose in view. And the boy was one of those who are helpless without the moral support of others of their kind, and Dick, although he had for some time conquered his own weakness of intemperance, still had the memory of experience to aid him in guiding another's weak will. Besides, he had his love for Ethel to support him at weak moments. This he confided to his young friend, as well as the words of hope that she had held out to him concerning what might take place when he had fully learned to live the New Life.

"And how do you propose to start, old man?" asked Noel one evening when the two friends had been discussing the matter from their hammock-chairs in the parlour of Winton's house with pipes aglow and the floodgates of confidence opened wide. "In the face of all that has passed it will be a toughish job to shake off old friends and start afresh."

Dick's enthusiasm was all afire in a moment. He bent over towards his companion at his side and spoke rapidly while his eyes glowed with hope.

"That's just what I do not want to do!" he said. "Of course I mean to start afresh, but I want to keep all the old friends and get them to start afresh too. At first I had seriously thought of giving up the ranch

altogether, and devoting all my time to a minister's calling. But on later thoughts I came to the conclusion that I could reach the boys better if I were mixing with them—buying and selling as one of themselves. I want now to show that a rancher may try to be a good man without being goody-goody; that a man may hope to be a Christian without cutting his old friends or giving up honest fun. As a layman, I could do this. I should be seriously handicapped as an ordained preacher."

Such a state of affairs must have greatly rewarded Ethel Ross, the "lady pilot," for her efforts beyond measure, and for some time it seemed to her as though the sunshine had burst through the clouds for a long day of summer. But there is no Eden lacking its serpent. One there was to whom this altered condition was far from welcome. Seth Gordon was that "one," and the resentment which he harboured towards the two prime movers of the innovation was deep and bitter. So long as his purse had been unaffected, he had been agreeable enough to any change that promised to relieve the monotony of prairie life. But he soon began to miss the substantial revenue that was wont to be his from the sale of smuggled "fire-water" at a profit of three-hundred per cent. Clearly, he thought, only two people were the cause of this decrease in his income, and these two, Ethel Ross and Dick Westgarth, must be quickly checkmated.

But Seth Gordon was cunning. It would not do to lament his woes from the housetops. Instead, he harnessed one of his bronchoes to his smartest turn-

out, and schooling his features into a fair semblance of goodness, set off for Steel's ranch in order to call upon the "pilot."

"I hear," he began smoothly, after the first preliminaries were over, "that you desire to erect a church in place of the barn, and that your only hindrance is the want of dollars to do it with?"

"That is so," replied the girl. Her heart gave a leap of hope that perhaps her labours were to be crowned with success when she least expected it, and that this reputed miser was about to offer funds for the purpose—another victory in her labour of love? Then she added: "I have been urging the necessity for some time, though I admit that I cannot see how I am to find sufficient money for the purpose at present."

"Well, that's just what I've come about," said the wily Seth. "You see, we all think a heap of you, and of what you have done for the place round about, and I thought, if it would help you to ease your mind a bit, you might count on me for anything up to a couple of thousand dollars."

Ethel was almost speechless at such unexpected munificence.

"Oh, Mr. Gordon, do you really mean it? You are not joking?"

"H'm," grunted the old man, "I suppose you all thought that this child was too old a sinner to fork out the dollars for such a purpose?"

"No, no!" Ethel hastened to assure the visitor. "I did not think that, though I am afraid we have not always judged you as you deserved."

"Most likely not," replied Seth, with a double meaning in his voice—a meaning that was quite lost upon his hearer. "But you'll understand me better when you know me better. I take a deal of knowing, miss, and that's straight ; but once you know me—well as I said : you'll understand me better. Now, as to the little matter of business—I have promised to give you a lift up in the direction you want, but I do not do these things without certain conditions."

The speaker raised his cunning eyes to look inquiringly into those of the girl, to see how she would meet his fencing. But the "pilot's" look met his with the antithesis of suspicion, and no immediate comment being forthcoming, Seth took out his pipe and proceeded to light it in silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

POISON FANGS.

"YOU see, miss," he began with pleasurable deliberation, "I want to make sure that this money is not going to be thrown away—that the church is really needed, or rather, that the boys will make use of it when it's built."

"I am sure that there need be no question about that," Ethel said emphatically. Yet Gordon was not satisfied. "No doubt, and I hope, with you, miss, that the boys will not turn over a bad leaf as suddenly as they turned over the good one. Now mind, I don't say that it *is* so, and I truly hope that it is not; but at the same time you must remember that the boys are under a sort of promise to you——"

"That ended some time ago," Ethel interrupted, and the other rejoined:

"The actual promise did, but not the understanding. As long as you are here, Miss Ross, the boys think themselves sort of bound to stand by you on account of what you did for Winton and the others. Then, of course, many of them are afraid of Westgarth, and they think that if they offend one, they offend the other."

Ethel drew herself up, and looked angrily at the speaker.

"You make a mistake, Mr. Gordon, if you attach any importance to such gossip."

With an excellent simulation of virtuous indignation, Seth raised his hands at the girl's words.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "Who would ever think that folks could be so downright wicked? And you so kind and all that to the boys, I can hardly believe it. And Dick, whom we all looked up to, and treated as a sort of leader—well, it quite takes away one's faith in the truth of human beings!" Then he rose with a pretence of leaving. "Ah, Miss Ross, I'm sorry for you. But you must pardon an old man who might easily be your grandfather. Old men do not watch their tongues as carefully as younger folks would do. But I'm sorry I spoke of it, though what you have said settles in my mind that the boys are *not* yet all that we had hoped. We'll talk of the matter of the church at another and better time."

The old hypocrite moved towards the door, but Ethel was before him. Slamming the door she turned her back upon it and faced Seth.

"Having said so much, Mr. Gordon, you will please finish! You have chosen to link my name with that of Mr. Westgarth, implying that such is the common talk of the ranches. I insist that you explain yourself!"

But Seth merely shrugged his shoulders with an action of unwilling resignation.

"I would have been mighty glad to have spared you, miss," he said, as he re-seated himself. The girl was still standing panting by the door—her lips set, and her eyes flashing with indignation. "I am sorry—

more sorry seeing how hard you take it. The man's a skunk to treat a girl like that, say I."

"You may spare yourself the pain of talking about it further than to tell me what I asked you," the girl responded. "What I wish to know is the gossip which, you say, the people are repeating concerning Mr. Westgarth and myself."

"It isn't exactly the people——"

"Who then?" the other demanded.

"Well," continued Seth with still assumed reluctance, "it was Dick himself who told us all in the store a few mail-days ago that—won't you let me off repeating it, Miss Ross? It's terrible hard to have to hurt you."

But Ethel's face was set, and her voice well controlled.

"I don't think—you can hurt me—now," she said in fixed tones, "please go on."

"Well, he said that he was only waiting until you and he was spliced, and then—then the boys would have all the good old times over again."

A spasm of pain dashed over poor Ethel's face. She was no adept at deceit, and she could not successfully hide her heart at such a crisis. Once or twice she tried to speak during the silence that followed the brute's false announcement, but each time her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and her lips refused to aid articulation.

At last she managed to speak. What need to attempt to conceal longer the wound that must be so visible to him who dealt it?

"Mr. Gordon—you are an old man—you have sons of your own who *might* have to suffer some day as I am suffering now—tell me: this is no mistake? You are not telling me this—just for—for a joke? It might be a cruel one—but—I could forgive you if—if—oh, God! that I might have been spared this—only this!" And, bursting into a flood of tears, the poor child sank into a chair near by, quite broken by the success of the old man's heartless deceit.

"Poor girl! Poor girl!" he said. "I am a father, and can feel for you. But you must try to bear up and not let him see that you care. That's the only way to treat people of that sort. I'm sure he never deserved to have a girl like you crying for him. But there, it just shows how double some folks can be."

"If tears could only mend it, Mr. Gordon," the girl sobbed, "I would be thankful to wring the last drops from my heart. It isn't so much for myself (God only knows that that is hard enough) but it is for the others who may slide back now that their leader has fallen—that is what is so hard to bear."

"And you'll bear it bravely, no doubt," added the man of sin with a sob in his voice and a smile in his heart. "It won't do for you to give in when so much depends on you. As to this matter of building a church—we can talk about that some other time—when you are more composed. I'll leave you now. You'll be better alone, won't you? And if ever you need a friend, poor child, try to think kindly of the old man whose duty *only* it was that led him to pain you at the expense of great pain to himself."

Then the wretch turned for the second time to leave the room, but a second time his departure was arrested.

Ethel started up and turned her tear-stained face towards Seth with a look of passionate entreaty that would have melted the heart of anyone save this old whisky smuggler.

"Mr. Gordon! Stop!" she cried. "Is this true—really true? Will you swear it?"

Seth raised his handkerchief to his eyes—presumably to staunch the sympathetic tears, but in reality to hide his delight at having accomplished the first steps towards his dearest desire, viz., a break in the unity of this fight against the illicit trade, and so leave open for him a way by which to gently insinuate the temptation again.

"Will you swear it?" she had begged, and Seth answered with a tremble in his voice:

"How could I dare to give you such pain if I had the smallest doubt about the truth of what I have been forced as a duty—a duty, mind you—to tell you?"

CHAPTER XIX.

RETRIBUTION.

SETH Gordon was in high glee as he returned towards home after successfully accomplishing his mission.

"She believed every word I said!" he chuckled to himself. "A little disappointment in his sweethearting will do old Dick no end of good. While the gel's flossing about, he's got no time to think straight; but this is going to keep them apart for a bit till he has time to come to his senses, and then it will be 'Goodbye' to preaching, and 'glad to see you' to good old times again. I've lost considerable during the past months on account of this 'revival' as they call it. Still, I guess when the boys come back to plenty after a spell of famine they'll make up for lost time after the rest." And again the old man chuckled at his cuteness.

On approaching his homestead, Seth noticed that there was an unwonted quietness about the house. As a rule, one of his sons or his wife was sure to be seen out-of-doors engaged with some of the many 'chores' that fall to the lot of farmers and their families. But on this day all was as quiet as if the place had been plague-stricken and deserted.

With such an unusual scene, a strange foreboding of

evil seized him. He could not tell what it was he feared or even what the exact cause was that inspired such fears.

"Hi! Tom! David! Alec!" he called, naming his sons in the order of their ages. But no one replied.

"Mary!" he cried as he entered the yard, and this time, in answer to the summons, his wife appeared in the door-way.

Mrs. Gordon was a tall, angular sort of woman—one of those whom the constant combat with labour seldom permits to be seen without apron and rolled up sleeves.

Slightly grey, her face wore the softened expression of long suffering mingled with the harder outlines of the pressed fighter, and, as she stood before her husband framed in the wooden doorway, Seth received a shock at the sight of the dark marks under her eyes that betokened the existence of more than usual suffering.

Awestruck at the apparition, Seth opened his mouth to speak, but his wife motioned him to silence, and signed him to advance. Silently the man obeyed, and in mystery at the strange movements followed where the woman led him into a small parlour at the back of the house. Once there, she closed the door, while with back towards it she faced her husband with catching breath as he still gazed at her with wondering inquiry.

Once or twice the poor woman tried to speak, but each time emotion conquered and words failed.

At last she managed to voice her will, but the words came in broken utterances laden with pent up tears.

"Seth—Seth—I have tried to be a good wife to you. When you was poor when you first come out, I worked skin and bone for you without grumbling, and when you

started the whisky trade, you know I never once said a word against you while my heart was aching those many and many nights. You know all this, Seth, although I never said a word about it before, and I didn't say much, did I, when you wouldn't let none of us go to the pilot's meetings? No, I never. But now, things is different. I can bear it no more, and unless I speak, I shall die! But your punishment has come at last. Come! Follow me!"

Turning sharply, the woman opened the door and led the way along a passage to the sleeping portion of the house. Seemingly unable to resist, Seth came in her wake and followed until she paused by a door before the bedroom of Alec, the youngest boy and jewel of the house. Seth had one tender spot in his heart which has hitherto been overlooked—not for lack of justice, but because circumstances did not demand the mention of the fact before. This tender spot was Alec, the Benjamin of his sons, and it was noticed that no matter how hard he might be with others, he was always gentle and considerate where this lad was concerned.

The pause before this door of all others was sufficient to strike a chill into the old man's heart that nothing else could reach, and for the first time he realised that there was more to account for his wife's strange demeanour than he had previously supposed.

Turning a white face to the woman, he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper:

"What is it, Mary? What is the matter with Alec?"

"God's hand has fallen upon our home. While you were away, the dark Angel came and——"

"He is not *dead*?" gasped the man.



"TOM HELD BACK HIS FATHER
WITH A GRIP OF STEEL."

"He sleeps free from sin and temptation," was the answer. Then she slightly opened the door, and Seth entered alone.

The room was in semi-darkness. By a bed on which was stretched a white-covered figure stood Tom Gordon looking down upon the still features of a handsome lad. The face was beautiful, and golden curls peeped from beneath linen bandages, which showed slight crimson stains.

At first the father was stunned by the sight. Then uttering the word "Alec!" with a vehemence that was a scream of despair, he sprang forward to the side of the bed. But as he did so, a hand darted out to restrain him, and Tom held back his father with a grip of steel while he pointed to the still form on the bed.

"Look!" he said. "See your work! Alec gone from us; your boy—our little Alec—*dead*!"

"It isn't true? It can't be true? Let me touch him; let me speak to him! My boy will answer me!"

"Whether you believe or not, old man we shall never hear his voice again," answered Tom roughly. "And who is to blame?"

"I? Not I!" replied Seth bewildered. "Why do you ask me like that?"

The elder son turned a look of positive hatred upon his father.

"Why do I ask you? Because it was you who taught us to think money was the only thing worth having; because it was you who taught us as boys to drink; and because this poor kid—barely sixteen—lying there was drunk when he was thrown from his horse to-day and

dragged by the stirrups across the prairie, where Westgarth found him, and carried him here—all that remains of our brother—that is why I ask who is to blame?"

But the words had been falling on deaf ears. While Tom had been speaking, Seth had been on his knees by the bedside staring with mute agony at the passive face of the dead boy.

Then he turned and looked at his eldest son with a look that was new and difficult to describe. It had lost much of its hardness, and the steely eyes wore an expression as though they had been strained with penetrating into the distance. With all there was a strange glow of awakened intelligence that made the old man almost "fatherly,"—a look that had hitherto been foreign to him.

For a few minutes he gazed without either exchanging a word.

"Tom!" he stammered at last, "we've been mighty wrong—all out of trail!"

"Guess I could have told you that much years ago," Tom muttered. Yet the old man continued: "It's never seemed to me other than right to make dollars how I could and when I could, but now—*what gold can bring me back my boy?*"

The last words rang out with a cry so plainly the echo of a broken heart and spirit, that even Tom—hard man that he was—felt touched by the evident distress.

"Little need to cry now that it's done, old man," was his practical, though not unkindly meant reply.

"Mine was the hand that killed him," Seth groaned.

"Somewhere's I've heard it said that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. This is *my* sin. Leave me! Leave me alone here with my punishment! I must think it out with—with Alec and—God!"

Tom started at the sound of that Name proceeding from his father's lips in other tones than those of cursing. But the old man was on his knees by the bedside, with his eyes closed, and his lips moving silently, and they instinctively knew from the expression on his face that it was no delirium that prompted the words; so obedient to his wishes he silently quitted the room.

CHAPTER XX.

FOR ALEC'S SAKE.

LEFT alone with his sorrow, the father slowly opened his eyes and looked long and silently into the still face beside him.

"Alec, my own boy Alec, where are you now? Can you see your old father kneeling here with such a mighty pain, and can you hear his voice begging you to forgive him for the terrible wrong he did you? Oh, boy! boy! if only you could say just one word to me—just lift your eyes once to tell the old 'man that he is forgiven, the pain would be a little more easy to bear, and everything would not be so very dark, and difficult." Again he paused, and remained silent with the peculiar attitude of listening to a distant voice. Soon he began to speak in the low tones as of one in communion with some awe-inspiring presence. "Yes, yes!" he exclaimed eagerly. "I hear you, Alec! I am listening!"

Another pause, while the sinner listened with catching breath to the voice of conscience which seemed, to his distressed mind, to be the prompting of his lost son.

"Undo what I have done?" he repeated. "It will be a thick tangle to unravel—years of mistakes and years of intended evil. But I'll do it, Alec; I'll do it; I swear I will! Oh, God! God! As you have been

just in punishing me, be kind to those I have been cruel to, and help me to call back the suffering I have given by my greed. Give me strength to do it, and then—deal with me as you will; I shall not murmur."

Then pressing his parched lips to the cold brow, strengthened with the Strength, he rose slowly to his feet and left the chamber of death—a humbled, repentant soul.

The early November dark had fallen upon the prairie, and when Seth reached the outer door he was met by a cold, keen wind that was sweeping from the northward. Looking to the horizon, his experienced eye told him that in an hour, or even less, one of those direful blizzards which descend at such seasons in the west with sudden whiteness was imminent. The change from autumn to winter in western Canada is often as swift as though the result of a magic wand waved over the land. You go to sleep with the sight of purple, green, gold and crimson in your eyes, and in a few hours you waken to see that the spirit of the north has breathed over the region, and a seething mass of snow blinds the vision beyond a few yards—lasting, perhaps, a couple of days or even a week, after which it departs and leaves everything clothed in a whiteness that remains until the sun of Spring as suddenly replaces verdure.

Such signs were familiar to Seth from his infancy. He turned indoors for warm outer clothing. Then he proceeded to the stables and began to harness one of the horses to the buckboard.

Though the night had fallen, and the wind was hissing with a fierceness that could portend but one result,

Seth Gordon mounted the buggy and set off in the direction of Winton's ranch where he knew Westgarth was still to be found.

"I'll see him first," he had said to himself on departing. "Then I'll take him to the pilot, and, when they know how I have been punished, maybe they'll not find it too difficult to forgive."

CHAPTER XXI.

A LETTER FROM HOME.

THE day that saw such changes in the Gordon house and such sorrow to the pilot was not devoid of interest to Westgarth, who was still living with Winton, for it was by that morning's mail that the rancher received his first letter from Sir Alfred, his father, ever since their parting many years ago.

It was Winton who brought the mail on that occasion, and when Dick recognised the handwriting on the envelope, he was as excited as a boy.

"It's from the dad!" he exclaimed as he himself tore open the envelope. "Dear old dad! His handwriting is a little more shaky than it used to be, but I would know it anywhere. You and I have no secrets from each other, so listen while I read:—

"My Dear Son,

"How can I sufficiently show my gratitude to Heaven that my son which was lost has been given back to me again? Your letter, with all its affectionate expressions, has made my old heart young again, and now my only thought is to see you once more. Let it be soon.

"You ask forgiveness? Oh, my boy, how much do we not need to forgive each other, and how much need

we both ask of Him who judges not so much by our deeds as by our strength. My punishment has been long, and heavy to bear. I doubt not that your life has been bitter enough in many ways. We must live then for the future, and, profiting by the past, make that future such as our consciences will not regret.

"The story of your life is sad, though I think that, in many respects you judge yourself a little too hardly. Still, perhaps it is well thus since the horror of the past will banish it for ever. Yes, it is all past. In the new hope, there need not be any looking back.

"I do not know how to express my great thankfulness to the brave girl who has done so much for you all. I thank you for your confidence in this matter, and I feel that if she will consent to become my daughter, my cup of benefits will be overflowing.

"I applaud your desire to build the much needed church in your district, and, if I am permitted, I would like to share in this monument to a good girl's work by building a manse. You can convey my wishes to those in control, and let me know their decision.

"But come to me soon, my son! Years have passed with leaden feet since you went away, and now each day seems an age while I am waiting for my son's return to his home. So come soon to

"Your affectionate father,

"ALFRED WESTGARTH."

"Well," said Winton, looking up as Westgarth finished. "I suppose this means that we will now have to make up our minds to lose you?"

"Not 'lose,'" replied Dick. "Of course I shall go to England as soon as I can arrange it, but you'll come too, Noel, as your mother proposes. You see, I can leave things safely in the hands of Riley. Then off we go for the old country—and home!"

Winton was easily influenced by enthusiasm.

"I would like it immensely," he agreed. "I can go at any time; but you—what of her?"

The rancher's face fell.

"I am afraid we shall find it difficult to persuade her to join us yet. I suppose what my father says is best. I must prove myself first. Before I can expect to be believed in, I must allow time for people to see that I can keep to the promises I have made, and after that, I hope to join in 'the work.'"

"By which you mean to become a minister, I suppose?" interrupted Noel, but the other was quick to remove the erroneous impression. "Far from it," he said. "I believe that, as an ordained preacher, I should be at a great disadvantage. What I want to show the cowboys around is that it is quite possible for one to be one of themselves, and still be a Christian. The general idea seems to be that a Christian cannot be jolly and enjoy life. Only a layman can prove the fallacy, and such would be my aim."

Further discussion of this interesting point of Dick's future intentions was interrupted by the arrival of Ned Riley, who had ridden over from the Westgarth ranch with a letter delivered there for the proprietor by one of the Steels.

The day had far advanced, and the cowboy, who had

experienced a cold ride, was glad to rest and warm himself prior to the return journey.

"It's blowing up for a regular blizzard," Ned explained, as he handed to Dick the object of his ride. "I guess there'll be a proper howler upon us by the next hour."

"In which case I shouldn't advise you to waste much time on the home trail," the rancher added as he received the letter, and glanced at the direction. "All well at the ranch?"

"Everything right as a trivet," was the reply. "We did as you told us about breaking up jars, and destroyed all the old hiding places. There ain't a trace of the old trade to be seen now."

"That's right," assented Dick, raising his eyes to Ned with an approving smile. "I knew I could trust you, and I know you will stand by me in the future. What do the boys think?"

"Well, some of them is with you, boss; and there's some as ain't," was the caustic reply. "*Our* boys are quite ready to see that what you do has got to stand. But the Gordons—well, there's a story going that the old man would move heaven and earth to do you an ill turn, and get things back as they were."

"That he will never accomplish as long as I have strength to prevent him," was Dick's emphatic comment. "He may move all earth, if he likes, but Heaven—Heaven is on *my* side, and against that he is powerless."

"Let's hope so," Ned said. "However, I must be making tracks before the storm starts. Good-night, boss! Good-night, Winton!" And in a few moments

the cowboy was in the saddle, cantering rapidly before the gathering storm.

Then Dick sat again, and leisurely began to open his letter. There was a smile upon his lips, as Noel, interpreting the meaning of the smile of pleasure at seeing a valued handwriting, discreetly resumed his paper.

Suddenly a cry of horror burst from the rancher's lips. Noel dropped his paper with a start to see his friend half risen from his chair with a face blanched and contorted with pain; his left hand nervously crumpling the letter which he had just ceased reading.

"Oh, Noel! Noel!" he gasped.

The young man was quickly at his friend's side.

"What is it, Dick? What is the matter, old man? Tell me. Let me help you!"

Westgarth strove bravely to regain his self-control. Then in a low monotone he spoke—not an atom of life in the sounds!

"It is—all—over. There is no—England—for me—now!" And with a wan smile that was heartbreaking to see, he sank back into the chair, and the ball of crumpled paper fell from his nerveless fingers and rolled on the floor.

Just then there came a wild wail of the wind whilst with sudden rattling like a volley of rifles the storm of snow which Riley had predicted burst upon the house.

Westgarth raised his eyes to meet those of his friend.

"A fitting night for such suffering. But the cry of the blizzard is nothing to the cry—*here*." And the poor man pointed to his breast, and his head sunk upon his hands.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FRIEND TO A FOE.

FOR a considerable time Noel sat silently by his friend. Men do not care to discuss their pains of the spirit. Their words are usually halting and weak if they do. But there is much in silent sympathy, and there was comfort in companionship, while the storm-fiends howled around the house and held a witches' sabbath on the prairie.

Suddenly Dick was startled from thoughts of his own trouble by a sound to him apart from the screaming of the tempest.

"Hark!" he exclaimed, swiftly raising his hand to the pose of strained listening.

"What is it?" the other enquired.

"I thought I heard a cry for help," said Dick, at the same time rising and going towards the door.

"It would be a powerful voice to be heard above such a noise of wind and snow," was Winton's comment.

"Not a bit of it," replied the rancher. "Given the right direction, a blizzard wind will carry the softest moan for a mile and repeat it to familiar ears. I know the sounds of the wind from long experience. I can detect the faintest foreign tone in an instant—Hark! there it is again!" And sure enough, even Winton's

inexperience could distinguish among the many shrieking sounds one different from the rest, distinctly echoing the cry, "Help! Help!"

Darting to the inner room, Dick Westgarth quickly arrayed himself in a stout coat, and seizing a stick made evident his intention of going to the rescue. He well knew what it meant to be lost in a blizzard on the prairie—a swift, though painless death after the first agony of fatigue was passed—and he knew that, if a rescue was to be expected, every second was of value.

Not a word spoke Winton. He knew his friend too well to attempt to dissuade him from undertaking the risk. Instead, he silently assisted in providing fur caps and mittens in place of the "cowboy" hat that Dick had hitherto worn. Then the door was flung open. The blinding snow covered the friends with white powder in an instant. A clasp of the hand; a simple "God help you" from Winton with the assenting "Amen" from the rancher—then Dick plunged in his errand into the pitch darkness and snow.

From the first he began calling, in the hope that the wanderer might hear and have strength to reply. But he floundered on without any answer.

Once he thought he heard a cry, and he renewed his efforts with fresh energy. But the sound was not repeated, so he attributed it to the error of his excited brain.

Hope of success was quickly leaving him. To search for one person at night on the prairie without any sound to guide him was about as hopeless as searching for one particular grain of sand on a desert.

And then, just as one may, with a sweep of the arm clear the crumbs from a cloth, so it seemed as though a Hand came behind the snow and swept it from the air, leaving a white mantle on the prairie reflecting the brightness of the moon that, until now, had been obscured. Such sudden changes are not uncommon with the first touch of winter. But Dick knew that the lull would probably be of short duration, giving place to greater fury than before.

Exerting all his strength, he again cried: "Hullo! Hullo!"

It was a sound that must have reverberated for miles across the plain of snow so great was the energy he put into the effort. This time he was rewarded. He heard a faint moan. It was not far distant; indeed, so faint was the sound that it could not have been uttered more than twenty yards to the east. In this direction, therefore, the rancher ran. "Hullo! Hullo!" he called again. "Help!" was the single word that came in answer—this time from what seemed to be a little mound of snow at his very feet.

"Thank God!" burst from Westgarth's lips, as he fell upon his knees, and began to tear away the snow from the form over which it had drifted.

A few minutes sufficed. The sufferer was too weak to move, but Dick soon raised him and began to chafe his stiffened limbs, though the frozen snow had so matted hair and beard that he was unrecognisable.

At last the old man was able to open his eyes.

"Westgarth!" he muttered, and Dick, recognising the voice, at once exclaimed: "What, Seth?"

"Yes—Seth," was the broken reply. "Leave him to die here. He is not—fit—to touch—such as—you. Leave him!"

"*Leave you?*" echoed the rancher in surprise, for of course he was unaware of the old man's recent treachery. "Not so long as God gives me strength to help you. You are near Winton's house. I'll have you there in a jiffy. Can you help yourself a little?"

A moan and a shake of the head was the only answer.

"Never mind, then," Dick said. "The distance is not great. What has got to be done must be managed somehow. See, let me have your arms round my neck and I'll carry you."

Then the rancher raised himself from the ground, and at the same time managed to swing Seth on his back. It was a heavy load, but he seemed to have a double gift of strength that night; and well was it needed, for just as they started on their way the tempest returned and enveloped them once more in a stinging mist of whiteness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL.

THE days went past, and the two ranchers, together with the old man whom they had rescued, were kept close prisoners by the blizzard.

Suffering tortures indescribable, poor Seth lay with his once frozen limbs swathed in oil-soaked wrappings. He was too weak to speak, and the only sounds that he uttered were moans of pain. He was tenderly nursed by Noel and Dick in turns, though the latter was often surprised to observe how the patient shrank from the touch of the one, while he evidenced no repulsion from contact with Winton, the other. Truly, coals of fire were being heaped on the old man's head.

It was a week before the storm abated sufficiently to enable Winton to communicate with Seth's home, and inform the wife and sons of the calamity. Then the doctor was sent for, while the old man was thickly wrapped in blankets and taken to his own home.

When the surgeon arrived he pronounced the case one of a most serious nature. The extremities of the four limbs were found to have been so badly frozen that amputation was an immediate necessity.

"It will mean a risk," the medical man said to Mrs. Gordon, when, after his examination, he had retired with

the woman to another room. "But it will be the only chance of saving his life from a rapid torturing death. I have given your husband something to ease the pain for a time, so he will be able to speak to you. Will you tell your husband?"

The brave woman simply bowed her head, and quietly left the doctor alone while she went on her mission.

Re-entering the bedroom, she found her husband lying more peacefully than she had seen him since he was brought to his home in his helpless state. The once frozen face was drawn with pain, and white as the sheets on which he lay. But he seemed glad to see his wife, and a smile was on his lips to greet her.

"I'm a sight better now, Mary," he said. "The pain has cleared, and left me quite easy. But my head is hot. Come, Mary girl, and lay your hand on my brow the way you used to do—years ago—when I was sick." Then he added with a choking in his throat: "There's heaps of old customs we've been and forgotten these years, Mary. It's a pity we didn't keep them up."

Mrs. Gordon was sitting by her husband's side by this time, and her cool hand was resting on the hot forehead, where she could feel the pulses leaping frantically.

"Don't fret, old man," she said softly. "God'll send the old times back again; and you and me'll spend the autumn-like years in making up for them as is lost. But Seth"—and her voice dropped lower; it wavered slightly, and her eyes moistened—"Seth, the doctor sent me to tell you something. Can you bear it? It's something that'll be terrible bad to bear."

The old man turned his eyes to his wife with a questioning look.

The woman gave a heavy sob. She bent over her husband—oh, so changed in mind and tone from the callousness to which she had long been used—and, kissing his forehead, laid her thin cheek upon that wrinkled brow.

"You see, you say you're feeling better and less pained," she resumed. "That's because Doc. gave you a dose of morphia to ease you a bit. But, dear—there's worse, much worse. He says you're going to die if—if—oh, God, help me to say it; I can't! I can't!" The speaker quite broke down, and her tears rained upon the white head beside her.

There were a few deep breaths from the old man; his brows lowered a little, and his lips tightened. He knew he had to steel himself for an ordeal.

"God *is* helping you, and helping me," he spoke, softly and with deep reverence. "You may tell me all, Mary. I can bear anything now, for He is with me."

Then the woman plunged into the terrible truth. She told how the doctor had said that his life was in great danger, but that there was only one possibility of saving him, and that was by amputation. The nervous shock that he had sustained would jeopardise even that alternative, but the hope of his life hung on one thread, and that, an immediate operation.

Seth listened in silence until his wife ceased speaking. Then he spoke slowly in an awed undertone, as if it were difficult to realise what he heard her say.

"You mean that he will have to remove my old

knotted hands, and the feet that have borne me in the prairie ever since they were the little brown legs of an innocent Yankee? You mean that I will never again be able to walk; never again be able to even feed myself?"

"My poor husband! *My* hands shall save both. I shall be everything for you," was the answer as she kissed him lovingly.

There was another pause before he spoke again.

"The punishment is a just one, Mary. I have sinned—sinned terribly against you, against the world, against Him. Then when I thought I had got everything my own way, He just came and took Alec, and then—then He laid me where I am—a helpless burden, soon to be more helpless and more burdensome. I reckon all He does is right. God's will be done." Seth paused again for strength, for the talking had considerably exhausted him. Soon he resumed, but with less energy and more haste.

"Mary, girl, I want you to send the two boys off as quick as horse-flesh will take them to fetch the pilot and Dick Westgarth here. I've wronged them terrible and I want to see them to put things straight in case—in case—*something* might happen with the chloroform. You'll see to this, Mary? Don't ask me why; just do it; and, if that something *does* happen, perhaps you'll have helped to open the Golden Gates for me, so that I can see our Alec once more. Now go, Mary. Tell the boys that they are to hurry for life or death—life if they succeed; worse than death to me if they fail."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TAMED RANCHER.

TWO years have passed. We are back again at the old shanty where we first got a glimpse of the untamed rancher and his motley crew. That shanty is still as it was, but a few yards distant stands a new house, commodious, beautifully decorated inside and out, with an artistic green-painted trellised verandah running round the entire building. It is the house that the ranchers of the district have prepared as a wedding gift to their old comrade Dick, and his wife, the "lady-pilot."

The young couple are expected to return that night from England, where they have been sojourning for some months with Westgarth's father in Somerset.

The verandah of the house—large enough to spread a dining-table if need be—is filled to its utmost capacity with cowboys in their full war paint. Spurs are jangling, voices laughing, pipes are smoking like factory chimneys, and a gay show of coloured shirts and scarfs completes a picture fitted for the frame of gorgeous Indian summer tints of crimson gold and purple that nature has splashed so lavishly in the background.

Suddenly there is the cry: "Here they come!" and a two-seated "democrat" is seen spinning along the trail

about a mile away, drawn by a couple of sleek young bronchoes that seem well aware of the honour of conducting the heroes of the day to their new home.

There are four occupants of the vehicle. Three of these are easily recognised (in spite of their old country trappings) as the pilot, Dick, and Winton. The fourth, however, is a stranger to the West, judging by the look of curiosity with which he regards his surroundings, and the foreign way in which he reclines in the "democrat" as though he were parading Rotten Row in a landau. But, if you look closely you will see, in spite of the grey hair and flowing white moustache, a marked resemblance to the firm lips and kind, yet determined eyes of him who handles the reins at the right of the lady in the front seat. He is Sir Alfred Westgarth, come to make a summer home where his son's chief interests lie.

Suddenly, just when the vehicle is about half a mile distant, out of the bush on either side of the trail dart a group of galloping cowboys, headed by Ned Riley, yelling like Indians; cheering, careering wildly round and round the trap, firing revolvers and rifles in the air.

"Good old Dick!"

"Welcome to the pilot!"

"Whoop! whoo-o-o-p!"

These are the chief sounds that are distinguishable above the medley of other yelling.

Instantly the signal is taken up by those on the verandah. Rifles cracking, revolvers rattling, feet stamping, and voices whooping with the peculiar cowboy cries as when rounding-up a bunch of cattle or horses.

Half laughing, half crying, the pilot waves her

handkerchief energetically, while Sir Alfred and Winton wave their arms in a manner that assuredly would have earned strait-jackets if exhibited in Piccadilly. Even when the trap drew up before the door of the new house, it was some time before the noise subsided sufficiently for Dick to make himself heard.

"Hold hard a second, boys! The horses are as excited as you are, and we can't alight!"

Immediately a dozen or more pairs of hands gripped bridle, saddle, trace, fore-lock, and muzzle, until the poor beasts had small chance to breathe, far less stir a muscle.

Then Dick jumped to the ground and handed out his bride. That was the signal for another burst of yells that threatened to bring down the firmament.

Then Ab. Shannon's voice was heard.

"Ease a bit, boys. Here's the old man!"

There was silence at once, and a pathway was made from the steps to the door of the house, out of which was seen to issue a wheel-chair propelled by Walter Mutch and containing a white-haired figure wrapped to the neck in rugs.

It was Seth Gordon—changed, so changed from the old cynical creature of old. His face was softened with suffering, and the child-like goodness of his face, reflecting as it did the spirit of Godly faith, so touched Ethel that she impulsively fell on her knees by the chair and kissed the old man with a daughter's tenderness.

"God bless you, girl, for what you have done for this land," Seth said brokenly, being overcome by the salutation. "You still forgive the old man for what he said?"

"Forgive," the girl murmured. "I have forgotten all but your sufferings. May God never forgive me if I willingly add one pang to the pains you have had to bear!"

Then, with the girl kneeling close to the chair and her head resting where an arm might have pressed her to his side with the fatherly love that was welling in his heart, the old man raised his quavering voice.

"Dick Westgarth! The boys asked me to bid you welcome in the name of all of them, and to hope that you and your wife will accept this house that we've built for you. It's the best we could raise among us, but it ain't half good enough for our pilot. But I guess you and she will understand that we mean our best, and we hope you'll live long to enjoy it among us."

A burst of applause approved this little speech, after which Dick, with characteristic impulsiveness, threw his arms wide apart and smiled around with a look that indicated how overwhelming was his gratitude.

"Boys," he said, at once dropping into the western vernacular, "I feel mean, downright mean. What have I done to deserve this?"

"Heaps!" was the reply from one.

"Nothing," answered Dick, "next to nothing." Then he pointed to the girl by the chair, while his voice rang with conscious pride. "It's she—*she* you have to thank. You know as well as I do, boys, that it was she who turned our prairie from a desert to a paradise. God bless *her*, boys, and help me to be worthy!"

At that moment, Seth was seen to whisper to one of the men at his right, and the cowboy retired hastily indoors, soon to return with a large Russian leather case

in his hands. There was a smile of pride upon the bearer's face that evidenced his appreciation of the great honour that was his at thus sharing in this, the chief event of the day.

"Just a moment more, boss," the old man said, "and then I guess we about finish the ceremonies. There's one more present we've got here, and that (we hope you'll not mind) is for Mrs. Westgarth only. I dare say *she'll* not think it up to much in some ways, but to us—to me and all the boys—we reckon it means more than all the rest put together. Open the case, Reynolds. See: it's just an ordinary stone-ware whisky jar which we thought as maybe you'd be kind enough to keep on a shelf somewheres in your new house. It's not worth much as dollars go, but we reckon it's of mighty value, for—*it's the only one to be found in the district for miles*. You'll see there is a silver plate in the front. It says:

"Presented by the boys
to

Our Lady Pilot

who steered us through rough seas to

The Pilot of All.

This jar is the only one known to be in the district, all others having been destroyed as a proof of our love and friendship."

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